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More Stories of Married Life

Mary Stewart Cutting

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More Stories of Married Life

Clasp him to her breast

[Page 84]

More Stories of Married Life

By

Mary Stewart Cutting

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A Little Surprise

A Little Surprise

ANITA GIBBONS had been waiting outside at the station on the bench nearest the field since twenty minutes of six, and it was now nearly seven as she rose to go. The bright pleasure with which she had started out was fled: he had not come. The sun, wind, and perfume of the spring afternoon, in combination with a becoming new suit and hat, had produced their annual effect of inspiring her to surprise her husband by meeting him on his return from town, that they might walk home bridally together in the sweet evening daylight. She had been hitherto undeterred by remembrance of the historic fact that Mr. Gibbons was never known to come on time when thus pleasurably expected; but memory was beginning to chill her now, as well as the wind on her back. She had done all this before!

Yet what business, unknown this morning, could have kept him? It was neither the first nor the last of the month, always mysterious days of threatened detention. He had not passed her by unnoticed, for she had risen as each train came in to scan the men who

dropped on to the platform and hurried off, some of them looking back to raise their hats to the pretty woman on the platform.

She hurried now as she walked across the field, feeling guiltily amid her disappointment that dinner would be waiting, and that she had left no word of her whereabouts with the maid, having in fact slipped out of the house unseen, to escape the clamouring notice of her only child, who was near his early bed-time.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Gibbons. Coming back from town so late?"

She looked up to see a friend approaching on the foot-path.

"Oh, good-evening, Mr. Ferris! No, I've only come from the station; I've been looking for my husband."

He stopped half-way past her.

"Why, he came out in the five-fifteen with me! He slipped off when it slowed up, and jumped down the embankment; he said he was in a hurry to get home. Too bad if you've missed him."

"Yes, it is," said Mrs. Gibbons, hastily, breaking almost into a run. Arnold, she knew, hated to find her out of the house.

As she went up the steps now, the door opened before she reached it, and an excited voice exclaimed: "Ah, ma'am, it's yourself

at last! It's the neighbourhood we do be having searched for you!"

"What do you mean, Katy?" Mrs. Gibbons, who had stood arrested on the threshold, pushed her way in. "Where is Mr. Gibbons?"

"He's gone."

"*Gone!*"

"Yes, ma'am, gone back to the city. 'Twas like this: he bid me say that he had to be meeting friends—I disremember the name—on the other side, at the ferry, or he could have telephoned 'em, ma'am. 'Twas a grand dinner they had planned for to-night, unexpected like."

"Was the name"—Mrs. Gibbons paused that she might have courage to grasp her loss—"Was the name Atterbury?"

"It was, ma'am."

Her beloved Atterburys! They were to sail for Rio at the end of the week. This was a dinner and a theatre party planned before and postponed. They *could* not have it without her.

"Mr. Gibbons must have known I'd be home in a minute!"

"Sure, he waited for you, ma'am, till he had to run to the station below to catch the express; but he bid me tell you to be sure and take the seven o'clock train in, and he'd

keep the party waiting at the ferry for you."

Mrs. Gibbons glanced at the clock. It was after seven now! But there was a seven-twenty-five train which reached town almost as soon, and Arnold would surely wait for that, even if the others had gone on to Martin's, where they would dine. The Atterburys always went to Martin's. She was accustomed to try and bend fate to her uses with an uncalculating ardour that focussed itself entirely on the impulse of the moment. To the suburbanite a little dinner in town is the height of pleasure, the one perfect feast! And with the Atterburys! She really could not miss it.

"I don't care for anything to eat. Don't let the fire out," she dictated rapidly. "See that Harold doesn't get uncovered, and *don't* bolt the front door. We'll be home before twelve, but you needn't sit up for us. Just lie on the lounge in the nursery." She did not remind forgetful Katy to put the milk tickets in the pail set outside the back door, and only remembered it as she was half-way to the station.

The train was due in town at eight-five, but it was late here, and the extra ten minutes seemed a thousand "prickly seconds." The spring twilight was coming to a close, and

when she stepped into the car in which the lamps gleamed dully over the plush seats, it was like stepping into the long tunnel of the night. Only a few men from further up the road sprawled and dozed wearily on their way. She was unaccustomed to going out thus alone, and for an instant a panic-struck thought of failure seized her, but she lost it in the action of her hurrying brain, which constantly pictured the delightful meeting with her expectant husband and the waiting party. By the inalienable law of travel, which ordains that delay in one mode of locomotion means delay in every other, the ferry-boat could not "hit her slip," but wobbled up and down crosswise in the current, bumping against the piles at either end, with much ringing of the pilot's bell, and losing of minutes—and minutes—and minutes. But at last Mrs. Gibbons made her way into the big, lighted waiting-room, the haven of her hopes. It took no more than one glance to reveal that there was neither group nor husband waiting for her. The place was entirely empty, save for a few Italian emigrants, and the clock pointed to twenty minutes of nine.

So vividly had Mrs. Gibbons pictured her own state of mind as that of her husband—a habit of which fell experience could not break her—that even in the shock of not finding

him she felt instantly that some provision had been made for this contingency. She could go straight over and join the party at Martin's, but he might have left some word for her. The man at the news stand might know. She hovered uncertainly around the pictorial exhibit, trying to screw up a suddenly-waning courage, and then found voice to say engagingly:

"I'm looking for my husband."

"What did you say, lady?" The man stopped in his work of sorting papers.

"I'm looking for my husband. He's been waiting for me here for a long time—with a party—but he's gone now. I thought perhaps he had left some message here with you."

"What kind of looking man was he?" asked the news clerk. He leaned forward companionably.

"He—he's tall, and clean shaven, with a light overcoat, and blue eyes—and——" She groped around for some distinguishing characteristic to elicit a gleam of response—"a square chin—with a dimple in it." She felt her own fatuousness. "You—you'd know him if you saw him."

The clerk turned to a boy who had appeared behind the counter.

"Did you see a man with a light overcoat,

and"—a spasm passed over his face—"and a dimple in his chin? Did he leave any message here?" Mrs. Gibbons felt hotly that he was laughing at her, although he looked impassive.

"Naw," said the boy, "he didn't leave no message with me." He added on reflection, "I ain't seen no one hanging 'round but a chunky feller with a black *mus*tache."

"He hasn't seen any one but a stout man with a black mustache," reported the clerk officially, while two pairs of eyes stared at her in a disconcerting manner.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Gibbons; is there anything we can do for you?"

"Oh, Mrs. Worthington—and Mr. Worthington!" Mrs. Gibbons looked as one who sees a familiar face in the desert. "You don't *know* how glad I am to meet you! I'm looking for my husband."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Worthington, with a faint chill of surprise. She was a slight woman, elegantly gowned, with a thin expressionless face. Her husband was like unto her, with the overcoat of opulence. They were new neighbours of Mrs. Gibbons, who kept themselves politely aloof from suburban social life, spending most of their time in town, where they seemed to have a large connection. They were perhaps the

last persons to whom Mrs. Gibbons would have turned in a dilemma, but she found comfort in their curious attention as she explained the situation, to conclude by saying:

"Of course, I'll go right over now to Martin's. If they waited for me here until after eight, they would be hardly more than started at dinner. All I want to know is what car I ought to take."

Mrs. Worthington's eyelids flickered a response to her husband.

"Pray allow us to escort you there," said Mr. Worthington. "It is really quite on our way."

"Oh, you're *very* kind," said Mrs. Gibbons, following her leaders gratefully, after a moment or two of demur. She had naturally the feeling that when a man took the thing in hand it would be all right.

"I didn't know it was so dark at night when you were out alone by yourself, until I came off the ferry-boat," she confided.

Mrs. Worthington's eyelids flickered assent. She sat in the trolley car in a sort of isolated though subdued richness of attire, her heavy silken skirts folded over decorously to escape contaminating touch, her embossed cloak and large boa held elegantly in place with her white-gloved hand. She

seemed to demand a coach and four. The light spring suit which Mrs. Gibbons had thought so fetching in the afternoon looked cheap and thin in comparison. She did not know of the blue intenseness of her eyes and the rich flush on her young cheek which made each man who entered the car turn to look at her.

When Mr. Worthington bent over from the suspending strap to ask, "You are quite sure your husband is at Martin's?" she answered with her bright, upward glance, "Oh, yes, quite sure!" He would be at a little round table, with John and Agnes Atterbury, in the red-carpeted room, looking out for her, and how glad they would be to see her!

She dashed up the steps ahead of the Worthingtons, and a waiter came deferentially forward. Why should her heart suddenly fail her when she stood looking in upon the lighted scene?

"I'm looking for my husband," said Mrs. Gibbons. She dashed from one doorway to another, peering in. "No, he isn't here—perhaps in the other room—I don't see him here either. It's very strange, *very!*"

"What is it Madame desires?" The head waiter was following her rushing movements.

"I'm looking for my husband"—in full

torrent of explanation her tone had grown louder. "He came here a little while ago." She paused, suddenly aware of a whisper sibilating around.

"She's looking for her husband." Several people stopped eating. The head waiter regarded her suspiciously.

"Was Monsieur alone?"

"No, oh, no!" said Mrs. Gibbons with eager candour. "No, indeed! There was a lady ——"

"Aa—h!" said the head waiter. "Monsieur was with another lady!" An embarrassing murmur of interest made itself felt. He fixed her with a placating eye, as he added, hurriedly, "But Monsieur, as Madame perceives, is not here. He exists not. If the carriage of Madame"—he stopped happily—"But behold now the friends of Madame!"

The wild blaze of happiness died down almost as suddenly as it had risen in Mrs. Gibbons' breast, as she turned to see the Worthingtons advancing decorously once more to her rescue. Her bright hopes were buried in ashes.

"Oh, I don't know what to do," she breathed. "He isn't here after all—*he isn't here!*"

"Will you not go on with us to the

opera?" asked Mrs. Worthington. "We would be very glad to have you. We did not care to get in for the first act."

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that—you're so very kind—but I couldn't really. I must get home at once. Mr. Gibbons will go home early. I want to go home."

"We will then, of course, return with you," said Mr. Worthington, resignedly.

"Oh, please, *please* don't! It isn't at all necessary. I *couldn't* have you do it. I know the way now, and—please don't!"

"Mr. Worthington will not allow you to go home alone," said his wife, with polite weariness of the subject. "The next train does not leave until ten o'clock. Of course, if you really wish so much to return—although Mr. Gibbons is not at all likely to get back before we would—do not hesitate out of consideration for us or *our* convenience. But I think you would enjoy the opera."

Mrs. Gibbons stood unhappily irresolute. How could she drag these people home with her, much as she now longed to get there? If they would *only* let her go alone! After all, if Arnold were off having a good time, why shouldn't she be gay and have a good time, too?

"Well, if you really want to take me—and

it won't be very late ——" She was conscious of her ungraciousness. "Oh, I'll enjoy it immensely!"

"We will leave whenever you say so," said Mr. Worthington, with his invariable deference.

So unused was Mrs. Gibbons to going out with any one but her husband that Mr. Worthington's arm felt startlingly thin and queer and unnatural when her hand rested on it as he helped her across the street. Everything was unnatural. Her acceptance, she found, necessitated his standing in the rear of the house, while she occupied his seat. Mrs. Worthington relinquished her entirely to the promised enjoyment. The music was indeed beautiful, but she still kept hold of the ever-tightening thread of suspense and longing; Arnold might be gay without her, but she couldn't be gay without him. To think of all she was missing choked her! Mr. Worthington came forward between the acts to ask perfunctorily if Mrs. Gibbons wished to leave, but his wife showed no signs of moving.

It was with the first joy of the evening that she saw the curtain descend, and felt that she could tear at full speed for the elevated road and her own dear ferry and her own dear home. She must get

there before Arnold, or he would be wild with anxiety; her desire to meet him in town was nothing to her desire now to head him off at home. But she reckoned without her host, literally. Her entertainers had been met by friends as they passed slowly down amid the crush in the aisle, and after the voluble greetings she was panic-struck by hearing one of the strangers say:

"You'll come to supper with us now? Just around the corner!"

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Worthington was almost animated. "If we have time," she added, turning to her husband.

"Why, we can't get the twelve o'clock, if we stay, but we will have plenty of time for the twelve-thirty, if Mrs. Gibbons doesn't object," said Mr. Worthington.

"We have a friend with us," said Mrs. Worthington, in languid explanation. "Mrs. Gibbons, Mrs. Freshet, Mr. Freshet."

"We will, of course, be pleased to have your friend take supper with us," said Mrs. Freshet.

How could Mrs. Gibbons object? Her eyes pleaded, but her lips were perforce silent; and, comfortably settled in the restaurant, the others talked about matters of common interest, while she sat on the edge of her chair by the gleaming little

table, and fumbled at her oysters with her fork, watching the hands of the clock at the end of the room. The Freshets were even more ornately dressed than the Worthingtons, with a floridity of manner that somehow overstepped a certain delicate line.

Once Mrs. Freshet smiled at the guest over her white satin and sables to ask:

"Is this the friend of whose beautiful home I have heard so much?"

"I—I think not," said Mrs. Gibbons, with a stricken glimpse of the interior of her little dwelling. "I only met the Worthingtons by accident to-night," she added, impulsively, with a longing for sympathy. "I was looking for my husband."

"How singular!" said Mrs. Freshet, with a blank stare, and turned at once to continue a conversation on bargains with Mrs. Worthington, while Mrs. Gibbons, trying to make sprightly remarks in response to Mr. Freshet and Mr. Worthington, agonizingly watched the clock. Ten minutes of twelve—five minutes of twelve—she could not have stood it a second longer, when Mr. Worthington rose to hurry them off.

The rushing of the elevated train could not keep up with Mrs. Gibbons' hastening spirit; but somehow, inexplicably, after a while even the rushing stopped—the train halted—went

forward a little—and halted again, between stations.

"Oh, *what* is the matter?" said Mrs. Gibbons, as Mr. Worthington returned with several men from investigation.

"Oh, nothing to speak of; there's a fire ahead somewhere, and we're blocked for a few minutes. Mrs. Gibbons—*Madam!* Pray keep your seat, you can *not* get out!"

"They do say as there's a family yet in the burning house," suggested a sympathizing listener.

"Naw, they got thim out, but there's two firemen hurted," said another.

"What is it, Amelia!" Mr. Worthington turned his attention hastily from Mrs. Gibbons to his wife. "Do you feel faint?"

"A little," murmured Mrs. Worthington, reproachfully.

Mrs. Gibbons had a sickened feeling. She could have felt faint too, if her husband had been along to sit down by her solicitously, and tell her to lean on him. She would have *liked* to feel faint. But instead, she was forced, in common decency, to be solicitous too for Mrs. Worthington, although she had begun to hate her. Mr. Worthington looked nervously at his watch until the train started again, and when they got out to walk to the ferry, he hurried his wife along at a pace

with which Mrs. Gibbons tried in vain to keep up over the uneven, dirty, dimly lighted pavements in those winding streets near the river. Arnold never let her walk so fast that way; she owned an ankle that had once been sprained, and sometimes now turned under her disastrously. But hurry as she might, they hurried faster, under the impulse of the new fear which made itself felt to her without the need of words. She caught up to the couple, and clutched them as they stood suddenly motionless, inside the ferry-house, facing her.

"What do you *stop* for? Why don't you go *on?*" she demanded fiercely, although she knew too well what the dread answer must be. The supreme stroke of suburban fate had befallen them. They had missed the last train out!

Only the initiated know what this really means. To be cut off inexorably from home, and the children, and the fires, and the incompetent servants or the anxious watchers—it is something subtly feared in every evening journey into town, but only once in a lifetime perhaps is it experienced.

"We had better go to a hotel," said Mrs. Worthington, with agitation. "We will *have* to go to a hotel, Foster."

"Perhaps we can get out home some way,"

he answered, with the instinct of the man who considers two hours in his own bed worth ten in any other.

Mrs. Gibbons cast the reserve of decency to the winds. They had made her miss this train! Her husband waiting for her—the sleeping Harold uncovered—the milk tickets to be put in the pail to-morrow—"I don't care what *you* do; *I* can't stay in town to-night. I *won't* stay in town, Mr. Worthington! I'll have to get home to-night if I *swim* for it!"

"No need to do that," said a man rapidly coming out with a pipe-smoking group from the ferry-house. "We're going out on the twelve-forty-five boat on the other road, a couple blocks below here, and take the trolley out. It's Mrs. Gibbons, isn't it? I don't believe you recognize me. I saw your husband an hour or so ago at Weber and Fields."

"Oh, *thank* you!" said Mrs. Gibbons. "Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!" She stumbled after the group over the cobblestones outside of the long wharves, still insanely warbling her gratitude, her protectors sullenly stalking after her. They crushed and wedged themselves into the midst of an unsavoury and strenuous populace on the boat that pushed out slowly into the fog of the river, but that did not

matter—they were saved, they were off! They were surely bound for that other side on which lay all that made life worth living. Then there was another mad rush for the trolley car that went their way. Fighting, struggling, pressing, the three shot into seats, exhausted, and whizzed off into the dark night. Mr. Worthington, after a few minutes, went sound asleep, lurching as the car lurched, his wife, poor woman, pale enough as she sat with face averted from Mrs. Gibbons, her lips pressed tightly together, one hand holding mechanically to her raiment, and the other within her husband's arm. Men sat with their heads on their sweethearts' shoulders, in true early morning trolley-car fashion, and every inch of standing room was packed too thick for the eye to penetrate with a singing, drunken, cat-calling, indecent crowd, the last scum of a great city. It was an offense to delicacy to be there. The lights flared wildly up and then went out at intervals. When they went out, Mrs. Gibbons felt a cold terror. She had always been afraid of drunken men, and she was so used to the protection of love! How sorry Arnold would be when she told him about it all, how tender he would be of her!

Oh, she had never realized before how utterly married she was, how long she had

ceased to remember the independence of her girlhood, for what a short distance her little struts and flights were planned! So helpless, so forlorn, so terribly outside of life was she without him, without that individual care which was as much a part of existence as her own ability to raise her food to her mouth, or move one foot before another! She thought of a woman she knew who had lost her husband, and who had said, "I did not know it could be like this." He had "given his body to the storm" many a time and oft for her dear sake; yet even for her a day might sometime come—like this—when —— Her soft cheek was cold and wet, and even through her thought of him she was also trying to get home and put those milk tickets in the pail so that the child would not be bereft in the morning. One must always remember a little child's needs.

"Ye're frightenin' the lady, ye big bloke."

"I ain't frightenin' of her, ye ——"

She shrank painfully at the notice thrust upon her. For hours, and hours, and hours they were jigging off over the dark salt meadows.

Crash, lurch, jam—everything came to a sudden stop. The conductor called, "All out here for the car ahead."

The sleeping ones awoke. In the scuffle

and rush forward Mrs. Gibbons became separated from her friends. The new car was already jammed when she reached it, with fighting in the doorway. With one foot raised to step up she was thrust to one side by a man who leapt from it, followed by several others dashing back across the tracks and down a side street, amid cries of "Catch him! Get the pocketbook! Catch the thief!"

There was a face—could it be her husband's? She turned wildly to peer after it into the blankness outside of the car lights. The next instant the bell had rung, and the car, with the crowd on the platform all looking one way, was vanishing swiftly down the roadway, while Mrs. Gibbons, unnoticed, stood alone upon the rails. She made a futile step after it, and then stopped, appalled. She was left behind.

Opposite was the long, cavernous opening of a car-house, filled with the stalled cars. Near her was a saloon, ending what seemed a scattered row of small, mean houses and shops, closed and dark. Ahead there was a stretch of empty lots, with a faint, stationary glimmer of light down the road. But the saloon, though by no means brilliant, was the lightest place. There was no sound from within. After some hesitation, Mrs. Gibbons wandered up on the low platform that topped

the two steps, watched by a couple of men from the car-house. Her heart was in her mouth as one of them came forward; but he only glanced at her and went in the saloon, to come out again with a wooden chair.

"Better set," he remarked, laconically, and disappeared across the street. A moment later there were other footsteps from the saloon, and looking up, she saw a policeman wiping his mouth.

"Got left by the car?" he said.

"Yes," said Mrs. Gibbons, raising her blue and guileless eyes to his. "I didn't know it was going so soon. I was looking for my husband."

The policeman's face changed from solicitude to the cheerful acceptance of a familiar situation.

"Give ye the slip, did he? A lady like you, too! Sure he's the bad lot, and not wort' your lookin' for. Now don't be frettin' yourself, the Queen couldn't be safer. I'm wid you till the car comes. 'Tis an hour away."

"It's very good of you," said Mrs. Gibbons, gratefully.

Of all the chances and changes of this wild Walpurgis night, there could be nothing stranger than this, that she, Nita Gibbons, should be sitting alone amid the dark marshes,

in front of a Jersey "gin-mill," at half-past two o'clock in the morning. It was so entirely past all imagining that frenzy had left her. She would probably never get home again, but she had ceased to struggle against fate. She sat there instead, passive, her slight figure bent against the cold night wind, and her hair half falling down under her battered hat, looking dreamily at the late twinkling stars in the black sky, and the gloomy car-house opposite, and at the policeman who walked up and down through the shadows. He swayed a little unsteadily, but he represented the guardianship of the law. Once he came close to her and asked encouragingly, "Would ye like a doggy?"

"What kind?" said Mrs. Gibbons, with a hazy fear of too large a protective animal.

He pointed over his shoulder towards the stationary light down the road. "The kind they do be havin' in the Owl Wagon, down there—frankfooties or doggies, 'tis the same. I could get ye wan, wid a roll; they're cleaned out in the s'loon here."

"Thank you, I'd rather not eat," said Mrs. Gibbons in haste, and then started nervously as the noise of footsteps running broke upon the ear. The three men who had followed the thief came in sight from the direction in which they had fled from the car. One called

out, "Good-night, I'm going to hoof it home!"

And another voice also called, "Glad you got your pocketbook back again—ought to have got the fellow, too."

The third said nothing, as he came towards the platform. Mrs. Gibbons turned her head away. The next instant a voice of amazement said, "*Nita!* You here!" and, looking up, she saw her husband.

"Oh, Arnold, Arnold!" She stopped short in view of his face. "Oh, Arnold, I don't wonder you're surprised to see me, dear, but I've been looking for you!"

"Looking for *me!* Nita! *Nita!* NITA!"

The astonishment in his voice held something ominous in it. She clung to his arm with both hands, as she rose with him, and hardly realized, in her excited explaining and explaining, that she was being borne off down the road without waiting for the car, at a tremendous pace, and still spasmodically explaining to a portentous silence. When he spoke at last it was in a tone that sounded dangerous:

"So the Worthingtons went off and *left* you?"

"No, no, they were *in* the car, they——"

"I'll—I'll *see* Worthington to-morrow!" He paused for control, and Mrs. Gibbons

had a swift vision of Mr. Worthington's head rolling off into a basket. "I never heard such a lot of crazy stuff—I never *heard* of such a thing—I *never* heard of such a thing! It all comes of your being out of the house when I came home. What on earth you want to go wild-goose chasing for at the very time you know I'm coming home——"

"But, Arnold, I *didn't* go wild-goose chasing. I went to the station to surprise you."

His anger grew.

"To surprise me! Then let me know next time you want to surprise me. I've had enough surprise to last me all the rest of my life."

He broke off with a shudder as if the thought were too much for him.

"Well, you just missed it, not being with us to-night. You'll never have such another chance, never. The Atterburys won't be back for five years."

"And did you enjoy it without *me!*"

"Enjoy it! Of course I enjoyed it. I'd have been a fool not to. I had a glorious time, the best dinner I ever ate, and Atterbury?—What on earth you wanted to spoil it all for I can't see. *Take* care!"—his arm went around her closely. "You'll turn your ankle." His touch was ineffably gentle and sure, in spite of the masterful rage of his tone.

"Oh, Arnold, I've been so unhappy all the evening. I——"

He went on, remorseless. "I'm glad you were. I hope you *were* unhappy. It will teach you never to do such a thing again. When you didn't meet us at the ferry, I was confounded. I couldn't think *what* had happened to you. If everything hadn't been ordered ahead, tickets and all, I'd have come straight home, but I couldn't leave the Atterburys in the lurch when *you* had, though I hated to go without you. It just spoiled the whole thing. I've been worrying ever since that infernal hold-up in the elevated, thinking of you at home alone, and then I find you gallivanting around at the junction at three o'clock in the morning, after coming out in that outrageous car. If I'd known you were there——! Well, you were just crazy to do such a thing"—he set his teeth—"it makes me *wild* to think of it. You don't know *what* might have happened. I'll be afraid to go off and leave you home alone. I don't know what you'll do. You ought to be looked after like a child. You oughtn't to be left a *minute*. What's the matter?"

He slowed up the pace that was rapidly nearing them to home. His storming voice deepened reluctantly into a distressful tenderness.

"What's the matter? You mustn't cry in the street, Nita! You mustn't, dear."

"Oh, I've had such a horrid, horrid, horrid time!" The tears were blinding her so that she leaned unseeing on the enfolding arm that guided her. "I don't mind your scolding me. I'm not crying for *that*. I don't mind anything you say. I don't mind even your not having kissed me. Nothing makes any difference to me as long as it's you. I'm crying because I'm so glad it's you, and I can hear your voice again. When I was trying to find you it seemed as if it would never end; it seemed—it seemed ——" She raised her wet eyes to his.

He took a swift look up and down the empty, lifeless street, laid out straight and stiff in the cold, faint glimmer of the dawn, and then his lips sought hers in deep, deep acknowledgment of the joy, and of the sorrow, to which all love is born—one of those moments stolen in its beautifulness from the life to come.

But his voice was tense again, as he set her down within her own doorway, and he looked at her with stern eyes of jealous care, from which she hid the woman's smile of love at dear love's unreason.

"You're nearly *dead!* Don't you stir out of this house to-morrow until I come home—do you hear? *Never* surprise me again!"

At the Sign of the Rubber Plant

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"I WONDER *what* he meant!"

Mrs. Thatcher had risen from the breakfast table from which her husband had departed some time since, after throwing out a mysterious hint about some event in store for her. She had better look out for—what? He had gone before she could question him further.

She went to the front window now, gazing down the street after Bobby, her only child, on his way to the kindergarten. She was a very tall young woman, yet lost none of her femininity by her height; it seemed rather to emphasize it in a willowy droop that always suggested an appealing dependence, in connection with the upward glance of her dark eyes. Her hair was dark, like her eyes, and very thick; her lips were red and curved; her cheeks were usually pale, but there was a faint glow on them now. Nevin had made a terse but complimentary remark about her appearance in that blue cambric morning dress, which she had received with as much innocent surprise as if she had not planned for it. He had also said that he pitied that

poor fellow next door whose wife was homely enough to take away his appetite.

Mr. Thatcher's attitude towards his wife was the subject both of good-natured comment and raillery among her neighbours. His least action towards her was charged, though unobtrusively, with that subtle and intimate attention which one only expects from a lover. He even had a way of helping her up and down the steps that was "different" to the married eye. Patently unintellectual as Mildred Thatcher was, she yet indisputably retained her charm for the man who *was* intellectual. She had, in fact, that sweet will to be beloved which instinctively foreruns occasion, and makes a place for it in all the little daily matters of life.

"I wonder what he meant! I feel exactly as if somebody would come out from town to-day—it's such a lovely morning." She spoke half aloud as she looked down the street through the green feathery foliage of the elms, just out in their spring dress. The sun shone caressingly through them upon the crocuses peeping out in the front grass-plot, and the air, delicately cool, was charged with perfume. There were all the usual adjuncts of spring in the suburbs. A department store wagon was already delivering parcels at a house further down, and several

women, fresh and neatly gloved, were alertly stepping trainward to get an early start for the day's shopping, impelled thither by that soft breeze which woos womankind to the pursuit of clothes. All down the block the palms and rubber plants were being sunned on piazza steps, the former, for the most part, conspicuously brown and withered, but the latter still chunkily green after a winter of furnace heat and dust and gas.

To feel the spring air and not want to spend money was impossible even to Mildred Thatcher, but even if she could have purchased the rug so badly needed for the little drawing-room she would not leave home today. She was sure some one would be out from town. She turned now to the maid and gave her orders for luncheon.

"You can make the cold meat into croquettes, Kitty, and we'll have pop-overs. And I'd like you to wash out the violet centerpiece."

"Very well, ma'am."

The hint of a pending pleasure had set its seal on the day. It might be Madge Stanfield who would come, or the Laviers, or her Cousin Lou. She set things to rights, and dusted and arranged daintily, and put fresh violets in the glass vases, and by and by, late in the morning, when all was done, went out on the

piazza to listen for the train, while deciding whether or no to send her dwindling palms to the florist. She scrutinized the rubber plant anxiously for some sign of growth. The rubber plant was, in a way, a proof of the demoralizing extremes of Mildred's nature. For a season she had railed intemperately at rubber plants and their possessors, and then, after moving from a flat to the suburbs, had incontinently gone forth one morning on the spur of the moment and bought one. It somehow didn't seem as if they were really householders without that green and visible emblem of a much-enduring domesticity. Mrs. Thatcher cherished an idea that her rubber plant would grow with tropical luxuriance, but as yet it had only remained stolidly green.

"Good-morning!"

It was a neighbour, who, deflecting from the pavement, came up, with a paper bag in one hand, to lean familiarly against the post at the foot of the low steps.

"Your plants need water," she continued, casting an officially critical eye upon them.

"They were watered this morning," said Mrs. Thatcher.

"It should be done at the same time every day," said the neighbour, obliviously. "Dear me, it's getting warm, isn't it? *You* look fresh and cool enough. I had to go to the

village at the last moment for rolls for lunch. I'm dreadfully tired. Spring weather does make your feet hurt so, doesn't it? Well—good-bye!"

Mrs. Thatcher still stood looking down the street—a train had come in while they were talking. Yes, there was some one coming—a lady in brown—it must be Madge. No, it was only Mrs. Brereton.

"Back from the city already?" she called, as the figure approached.

"Yes. I only went in to match a sample. Dear me! how warm it is! This weather makes your feet hurt dreadfully. I wanted to stay in town and do something about furnishing the new house, but it takes so long to look at rugs, and I've a dressmaker waiting for me at home this moment." She stopped an instant, leaning against the post, as the other had done. "How dry your plants look! they need water! Mercy! is that Meyer's wagon stopping before my house? Well, good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Thatcher, coolly. Not only was Meyer's wagon standing before Mrs. Brereton's, but several other wagons from department stores were stopping further up the street, sending forth boys laden up to the chin with fat, brown parcels and long, narrow, brown parcels. Mrs. Thatcher turned

around to see yet another friend, who, without her hat, had come out of the house adjoining, and now dropped down beside her on the steps.

"Isn't it heavenly! I saw you out here and couldn't resist coming over for a minute. I've been sewing so hard on the children's spring clothes, I've hardly had a glimpse of you for a week.—Your plants need water, don't they?"

"No, they don't," said Mrs. Thatcher, with unspeakable exasperation. She controlled herself with an effort as she rose. "I'm sorry, but I've got to go in the house. I'm rather expecting company."

"The express wagon seems to be coming here," said the friend detainingly.

"Why, so it is!" cried Mrs. Thatcher, her irritation subsiding before this new interest. The unexpected advent of the express wagon always suggested pleasing and mysterious possibilities to her, until recollection brought to mind the usual case of mineral water, or the box from the tailor's with her husband's discarded clothing. This time, however, it was a box of another kind, oblong and wooden. The man who deposited it in the little square hall evidently found it heavy. This, then, was what Nevin had meant.

What could it be? Mrs. Thatcher stubbed

her finger with the screw-driver, and hit her own nail lustily with the hammer, in her efforts to open the box. When she finally succeeded, and caught sight of the contents, she pushed it from her with a sharp exclamation of disgust.

Inside were two rows of large, morocco-bound volumes. The gilt lettering on the back showed that they were "Selections from the Literature of All Nations, with Lives of the Authors."

"Of all things!" said Mrs. Thatcher in a tone of deep disappointment. "What on *earth* does he want to keep on getting these subscription things for? And he *knows* we need the money for the rug. He'll never read these—he'll never even look at them. I cannot understand it! He never *sees* a book without wanting to buy it—he says he just likes to *have* books. Well, *he'll* have to find a place to put these, for I can't."

"Shall I take the books out of the box, ma'am?" asked Kitty, coming into the hall.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Mrs. Thatcher wearily. "Yes, I suppose you'll have to; we can't leave the box here." She looked over at the tiny drawing-room, with its little spindle-legged mahogany tea-table, the low well-filled bookcase, the rattan sofa

with its bright pillows, and the small upright piano, and then at the solid pile of information at her feet. There were thirty volumes —for she had counted them—thirty volumes pressed down and running over with the Literature of All Nations.

"I suppose you'll have to pile them up in the corner over there. I'm sure *I* don't know what to do with them."

"And shall I put the lunch on now, ma'am?"

"Is it time? Oh, yes; Bobby is coming in. Yes, put it on."

Croquettes and pop-overs and the violet centerpiece for this arrival by express, indeed! She felt unaccountably defrauded—a sensation that lingered with her throughout the whole afternoon, and tinged her with melancholy, even when she responded to the playful overtures or the needs of Bobby, who kept continually running in from the back yard to have his ball mended, or a string tied to something. He struggled away from her when she wanted to kiss him, and he smelled indescribably of earth. He was of the sex which grew up to have strange ways and alien tastes—he even had them now. Mrs. Thatcher had not wanted a boy, although she loved this one devotedly. She longed inexpressibly sometimes for a dear little

gentle, clinging girl, who could be frivolously dressed in soft, white, ruffly things, and have her sweet hair curled.

Mildred Thatcher could never help a mysteriously hurt feeling when her Nevin spent his money for books, or indeed for anything apart from her, of his own volition; there were always so many things needed perennially by "the house," not to speak of her own wardrobe. Her feminine mind was incapacitated by nature from seeing anything from a man's point of view—it was from the sheer force of her love alone that she leapt the chasm between them. It was from the heart, not the mind, that she divined what she did of him, as the blind see through feeling finger-tips. And even when she could not perceive how he wanted his own way—nay, when she had protested against it with intensity—after she had once proved herself in the right, she was apt to be overtaken by a sweet, fiercely unreasoning desire that he should have everything he wanted, just because he wanted it, and because he would love her better if he did, and she would grovel, and cringe, and eat her words unblushingly, in her efforts to drive him back into his own path. If she used all her energy now to making him send that wealth of literature back where it came

from, she would probably labour still harder the next day to make him get it again.

There was an aloofness in her greeting, when he came home a little earlier than usual, which he was unusually quick to detect. His eyes were agreeably expectant, with none of the deprecation in them which she had looked for. Mr. Thatcher himself was one of Mildred's inconsistencies. She had sworn that she would never marry any but a very tall man, yet her Nevin, stalwart and broad-shouldered as he was, did not top the highest roll of her dark hair.

"What's the matter?" His hand lingered on her shoulder. "Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, yes—pretty well."

"Did you get the package I sent by express?"

"Yes; what to do with all those volumes I do not know. It is so inconsiderate of you when——"

"Oh, I didn't mean the books—and I stopped at the carpenter's; he is going to make shelves for them. But I meant the other package."

"There wasn't any other package."

"Yes, there was"—his arm was still half around her. "I sent you—why here's the expressman now. Hi! This is the place: yes, bring it here."

He came back again to his wife. "There was a little debt paid me yesterday. After I got the books, I thought I'd buy a present for you." He pressed her shoulder gently.

"Oh!"

"Something you've been wanting a long time, something you'll like. It's the large rug for the parlour."

"The rug—Nevin, you *didn't* get a rug without *me?*"

"You'll find it's all right when you see it. Stand off a moment"—he was disposing of the knotted cords with sharp clicks of his penknife. "I'll spread it out for you. There—what do you think of that?"

"What did you pay for it?" asked Mrs. Thatcher in an odd voice.

"Not much, considering what it's worth," said her husband, still exuberant. "It's genuine something or other, I forget what. I got it at a bargain at a place down-town where they are selling off. It took my eye the moment I saw it. What's the matter, Mildred? Don't you like it?"

"Why, it's very nice," said Mrs. Thatcher, trying to keep rein on her feelings. "Only *of course*, those reds and yellows don't go with anything that we have; it would look perfectly dreadful with the old rose wall-paper."

"Why, I don't see that it would."

Mr. Thatcher was still lovingly regarding the article in question, stretched out in the hall. "They put all kinds of colours together nowadays. Here, let me set it out where it belongs, and see if you don't think it looks all right."

He switched a chair or two out of the way, moved back the tea-table, and stretched the rug down on the open space on the floor. He stood off admiringly. "Now, don't you think that's fine? Why don't you speak?"

"Oh, Nevin, it's *too* dreadful! Can't you see? It's a disgrace, a perfect disgrace. I wouldn't have any one I cared for come into the house with that thing on the floor; I don't know *what* they'd think of me." Her voice had gone beyond control, and rose more and more hysterical.

"Oh, how *could* you be mean enough to go and buy a rug without me—something I'd set my *heart* on. A rug, of all *things*, that you have to live with always! And I had been looking forward so to choosing it with you! Why didn't you tell me about it? It's so terrible, it's so *common*——"

"'Common!' Now you don't know what you're talking about." Mr. Thatcher's confidence in the pleasing powers of his purchase died hard. "It's genuine—I forget just

what, but it *is* genuine. I thought you'd know."

"I *do* know—it's one of the cheapest kinds there are. Nevin, I can't have it in here, you *must* understand that. Why, I couldn't eat my meals if I had to look in and see it. Can't you take it back and change it?"

"Change it!"

Mildred had known, even as she spoke, that the suggestion was unforgivable. She could go to town merrily, day after day, exchanging goods, but her husband would have felt like a sneak thief if he had taken anything back to "change it."

"No, I can *not!*" His anger was at last aroused, and thoroughly. "If you don't like the thing you can chuck it out into the street, for all I care. I tried to give you a pleasure, and this is what I get for it. I'll never buy you another thing as long as I live!"

It was on the tip of Mrs. Thatcher's tongue to say, "I hope you won't," but this time something restrained her. There were but few times that she had seen her husband as angry as this, and never at her, though there might have been more provocative occasions. He had bought many things before which she had not liked, without any real friction between husband and wife—it was one of "his" ways which they had often laughed

over. But each day's path is different from that of yesterday—what has been a convenient stone to rest on before becomes unexpectedly a stumbling-block in the way. Mr. Thatcher's wrath, indeed, gathered its greatest force from the underlying knowledge that he might have done differently.

The subject was dropped at dinner, but Mrs. Thatcher could not forbear beginning on it again afterwards. Nevin *must* see how dreadful it was to have that rug, if it was properly put to him. But he stopped her after the first tearful expostulations.

"Never say 'rug' to me again," he commanded briefly. "You've said too much already." He read a magazine all the evening, and after a while she went up-stairs and lay down on the edge of Bobby's little bed, beside her sleeping child, and wept.

It was unbelievable, unbearable, that he could buy that horrible thing without her! And there was no other place in the tiny house to put it. When she looked at it in the morning it was worse even than she had dreamed—it put her teeth on edge. The home didn't seem like *hers!* She averted her face from it patiently at breakfast, and her mouth drooped pathetically, but Nevin only read his paper and kissed her unseeingly when he left. When he was gone, she and

Kitty rolled the rug up into a corner. If any one came they could think she was cleaning house.

And on the morrow, and the morrow after, the rug, like a malevolent force, still separated them. She would have given it away if she could have afforded to have done so. As time went on there was a certain change in her own way of regarding it. Still she had that choked sensation when she thought of his going and buying it without her, but she did not think of it as often. She began to discern that she had lost something inconceivably more precious than the sublimated rug of her fancy. It was not only that Nevin had no longer any desire to buy her anything, but there was a subtle reservation of spirit. In that fit of unreasoning passion she had lost some attraction for him, some of that aureole of romance which is at once the most intangible and the dearest possession of the married, for which a woman may indeed keep her most shining thought, her sweetest care. What was any rug compared with her husband's sentiment for her? Yet it was not a mere rug to her, but one of the symbols of a home. Did she love him ten times more, the sight of that cheap and glaring inconsistency would bring the vexed tears to her eyes. She knew her limitations by instinct

—it was no use to try and laugh at being parted by a colour scheme—never could she be heroically strong enough to move and have her being as if the rug were not there.

For nine days Mildred Thatcher lived as her neighbours, a life as thick and solid, as uninformed with the spirit as the rubber plant which stood neglected in the drawing-room by the pile of books—as yet unshelved—and the dusty upright piano. The palms had gone to the florist's, and she had no heart to take the rubber plant in and out each day. She did not care whether the thing died or not. She did not care for anything. Every night when Nevin came home, she greeted him as calmly and affectionately as he greeted her, and waited, tingling, for developments which never came. The rug, which dominated her every waking moment, had, indeed, been almost forgotten by him—pressed out of sight, as is a man's wont with disagreeable domestic happenings, only the unpleasant impression remaining. He read or went to sleep on the sofa, and they both spent some evenings out. After a week had passed, and while Mildred was waiting for the change in her husband's manner, it suddenly came over her with a strange shock that he was not only losing his delicate perception of her, but that he was growing content without it.

It is so easy to lapse to the lower level! They were getting into the rut that only grows the deeper with travel.

Then there came a day when Mrs. Thatcher could stand it no longer. She had a consultation with Mrs. Brereton, and the next morning the latter came over and the two talked further with great animation over the rug in the little drawing-room. After that Mrs. Thatcher dressed herself with unusual care. She put on her new dark blue suit and a hat that her husband always admired, although it was not quite in the fashion. She looked at herself again and again in the glass before she started for the train, giving a touch here and a touch there with nervous fingers. She could not wait for her husband to come home, even if she had been less painfully aware of her new powerlessness in the conventional surroundings. She must venture into new scenes if she would gain what she wanted. And she could not stand this a minute longer—she must end it all *now*.

Yet, her heart was beating painfully as she neared the city, and she was only somewhat reassured by the glimpse in the ferry-boat mirror of a tall, slender-throated woman with soft, pale cheeks and a curved mouth, her dark eyes gazing indifferently before her under a hat whose cherry wreath drooped

against her dark hair, and who turned out to be herself. If she really looked like that——

Her hand lingered on the knob of the ground-glass door that led to the office of her husband's factory. Then she opened it.

"Nevin!"

Her husband, broad and square-shouldered, was standing over another man's desk, beyond, talking. There were lines of care on his forehead, and a pencil behind his ear—he was the man of business, not her husband.

He looked up amazed as he saw his wife, but came forward at once.

"Why, *Mildred!*"

"Oh, Nevin, I hope you don't mind! I've been feeling so dreadfully, I couldn't stand it a moment longer. I've something—something to tell you."

She began to shake a little, her lip trembled, her eyes looked appealingly at him like a child's. Her husband had always known as a matter of course that she was beautiful, but her beauty came now like a surprise in the dingy surroundings of the factory office, with the whirr of the planing machines beyond. His eyes met the appeal in hers with a smile that set her pulse beating anew, as he said:

"What is it? Hadn't you better sit down?"

"No, no! Not yet. Maybe you won't want me to—— Oh, Nevin, I've been trying to tell you every night lately how sorry I was—I'd acted so—about the rug—and I couldn't! You wouldn't give me a chance."

The well-known stiffness came over him—a shadow of the past shade.

"That's of no consequence—don't let's talk about it."

"Yes, *please*—I must! Oh, Nevin, I hope you won't mind. I knew I couldn't be decent while the rug was there. I'm so frightfully narrow-minded—things make me horrid even when I don't want to be. I've—I've sold it."

"*Sold* it?"

"Yes. Mrs. Brereton bought it for her brother-in-law's room. She didn't pay quite as much as you did—you left the price mark on—but she said you were cheated."

"*I* don't care what you do with it. I thought it was a pretty good sort, myself."

"It was a *lovely* rug," said Mrs. Thatcher earnestly, "only it wasn't in the right place. It was just what Mrs. Brereton wanted—for her brother-in-law. But it seemed so mean of me to sell it—when it was your present—and I've been so unhappy lately—Nevin—you *can't think!*"

Her eyes brimmed as she gazed at him;

the red cherries in her hat shook against the dark hair that framed her soft, pale cheeks.

"Sit down," said Mr. Thatcher briefly, pushing a wooden armed office chair towards her. He went away momentarily, and then came back. "Have you had your lunch?"

"No," replied Mrs. Thatcher faintly.

"Well, neither have I. I think you'd be better for something to eat. You wait five minutes and I'll be ready to go out with you. We'll have a little lunch together."

She raised her drooping head to give him the wistfully pleased, half-encouraged look of one dependent on a benign higher power. Her heart was swelling with the joy of triumph.

When he returned to her with his overcoat, he had been brushed clear of the factory dust and looked trim and smiling, hat in hand.

"It's nearly two o'clock. I think I won't come back here this afternoon; I've got through about all there is to do. It's a dull day. I'm going to take you around to the Electrographic Club to lunch; they've got a new room for ladies. You'd like to see the pictures there. Come on—this way."

"Oh, how lovely!" said Mrs. Thatcher, with a deep, contented sigh. "How *good* you are, Nevin! Do I look all right?"

"Oh, you'll do," said her husband, with an affectionate squeeze of the arm next him. "See here! You mustn't look at me in the street that way; people will think we're engaged."

"Well, why not?" murmured Mrs. Thatcher. "I don't care what anybody thinks—Darling!"

"Yes, my husband selected it," said Mildred. The next door neighbour was standing in Mrs. Thatcher's little drawing-room with her, and they were both looking down at a dark velvety rug with an Oriental blend of colours in it. "It was a present to me, but he wouldn't *think* of getting it alone—though he has such excellent taste. We made quite a little event of buying it yesterday."

"It is beautiful," said the neighbour, with a regretful sigh. "How dry that rubber plant looks; it needs water. Why don't you have it outdoors?"

"Oh, I have it out all the time," asseverated Mrs. Thatcher hastily. "At least, *nearly* all the time. Lately I've forgotten to see about it. I've been so—so *busy*. Why, I do believe there's a new green leaf coming out at the top!"

"Rubber plants can stand a great deal,"

said the neighbour philosophically, following Mrs. Thatcher, who was lugging the heavy pot out into the wooing breeze of the late afternoon. She was so touchingly happy that she felt as if she could have lifted mountains.

She stood and looked down the elm-shaded street, through which the footsteps of her beloved would soon be hastening to her. The department store wagons were still rattling up and down, delivering relays and relays of parcels at the different houses, and here and there weary, draggled-looking women were returning from town, each carrying by one end the large paper bag which contains an untrimmed hat. You could tell by the way they walked that their feet hurt. Down the block the freshening palms and rubber plants were grouped at intervals. On Mrs. Thatcher's piazza, the emblem of a much-enduring domesticity once more stood in the sunshine, stolid and green.

The Terminal

The Terminal

IT was Saturday night—the married "drummer's" homesick night. Mr. Martin Prescott, walking into the long, narrow hotel bedroom, felt more than ever the wearing familiarity of the scene that met his eye. There were the same dull carpet, the Michigan pine furniture, the drab striped wallpaper, the windows shaded only by little slatted inside shutters, to which he was used in third-rate towns. There was even the same indefinable chill, dusty smell that was associated with evenings of figuring over sales on the coverless table, under the weak, single-armed gas burner that jutted out from the wall at the side of the bureau. Yet, cheerless as it was, he preferred its seclusion just now to the more convivial bar-room, where the liquor and the jokes and the conversation of "the boys" had all the same jading flavour, and he felt unequal to bracing his spirit sufficiently to receiving the Saturday confidences of the garrulous or the weary. Reticent both by habit and principle as to his intimate affairs, he was no stranger to his kind, and in the top strata of

his mind were embedded many curious evidences of other men's lives.

But to-night he had a matter on his mind that companied him whether he would or no, and he was sore at having to stay over in this little town, from which there was egress once only in twenty-four hours. He had waited for a customer who did not arrive in the place until too late for him to get out of it, and had hereby missed the letter from his wife which was waiting for him some hundred miles further westward. Prescott did not, in a way, dislike travelling as a business; his wife always comforted herself with the thought that there were other modes of earning a living more inherently disagreeable to him, yet there were days and nights of a paucity which he was glad she could not picture. Saturday night away from home in this kind of a town, without a letter—when the last one had been disquieting—reached the limit of endurance. He felt that he had travelled long enough.

He made his preparations for the evening with the wontedness of custom. He locked the door, turned up the gas, and worked over the screw in the lukewarm radiator. Then he drew the cane-bottomed rocking-chair underneath the gas burner, and placed a couple of magazines on the bureau beside

him, his lean, bearded face reflected in the shadowy mirror above it. He opened his valise and took from it a folding leather photograph case containing the picture of a woman and three children. Prestcott gazed at it hard for a few moments before standing it up beside the magazines. He was trying to find an answer to the question he was debating: if he could manage in some way to supplement by three hundred dollars more the income of a new position offered him, he might be able to accept it and stay at home for ever.

He lit his pipe and, putting his heavily booted feet on a chair, began to cut the leaves of a magazine with his pocket-knife. He had meant to get his slippers out of the bag and make himself comfortable, but somehow, after looking at the photographs, he had forgotten about himself. He had written his daily letter to his wife before the last-going train, and he would not begin a fresh sheet now—no matter what he wrote, she would divine his mood. You have to be very careful what you write in a letter that is read some days after, lest you cloud the sunshine for another when it has brightened again for you.

"What is it?"

He sprang up as a knock came to the

door, after first hastily sweeping the photograph case into the valise. He hoped devoutly that it was not a visitor; there was no one in this town whose presence would not be an intrusion to-night. But he gave a glad start of surprise as his eyes fell on the man standing with the bell-boy in the hall.

"Brenner! Well, this *is* good! I never dreamed of seeing *you* here."

"I don't wonder," said the stranger, a pleasant, fresh-faced, broad-shouldered young fellow, with a light mustache. "It's ages since I set eyes on you; I changed my route, and then, two years ago, I married. We only moved here last spring. Jim Halliday told me this afternoon that you were in town. What a soak he is! But don't let's waste time here; I want you to come right around and spend the evening at our house; I want you to meet my wife."

"I'll be delighted," said Prescott with alacrity. He locked the bedroom door and the two walked out together, conversing briskly as they went. He and the younger Brenner had been chance companions on several notable trips in former years, drawn together in spite of dissimilarities in taste and education by a certain clear and simple cleanness of mind which unerringly divines its kin. The air had seemed raw and chill earlier, but good

fellowship had put its warmth into the winter world with Brenner's presence.

"So you're married," said Prescott presently. "I remember that I heard of it. I've wondered at not meeting you anywhere; I didn't know you'd given up the road."

"Well, yes, I've quit," said Brenner. "My wife didn't like me to be away so much, used to get scared nights, and there's a sight of things to see to when you have a house—the coal, you know, and the plumbing getting out of order, and then after the boy came—oh, yes, I've quit it all right. Seems sort of tied down in a way after you've been your own boss, but I'm not sorry—I'm pretty well fixed, I guess. Travelling's all very well for a single man, but it gets to be an awful pull after you're married. You miss a lot."

"I've been travelling for sixteen years," said Prescott soberly; "two years before I married—at twenty-four—and fourteen since."

"That so? It's a pretty long time."

"Yes, it is. I've been wanting to give it up." He hesitated, and then continued with rare expansiveness: "The fact is, there's a position open for me at home now, but I can't quite see my way clear to taking it. The salary's nominally all right, but there's my living to be taken into account, and other things. I figure out that it would mean about

three hundred dollars a year less than we have now—and I don't see how we could live on that. You see, the trouble is it's away out of the line I'm in now—yet there *may* be a future in it."

He went into explanatory detail, led on by Brenner's questioning interest.

"Couldn't you make it up in any way by outside commissions?"

Prescott nodded. "Ah, that's what I'm trying to get at. You're a wise man to have made the break early, Brenner. Every year I've meant to." Prescott spoke with a bitter patience. "I've never thought of my being on the road as anything but temporary, and here I'm at it still. The longer you wait, the harder it gets to change; you don't know how to take the risk. I haven't told my wife yet about this offer, for I don't want to disappoint her. I hoped to have had a letter from her to-night—the last one was rather disquieting—but I'm behind my schedule."

"Well, I know what that is," said Brenner heartily. "I had a letter from Mame once after we were first married—she'd cried all over the paper in big blots; she thought she'd die before morning. Well, my train was snowed up in a South Dakota blizzard and I never got another letter for a week. *Holy smoke!* I never want to go through that

kind of a racket again. Then, when I *did* hear, I found she'd been to a party the next evening as chipper as you please—belle of the ball. I tell you there's too much seesaw about that sort of thing for a limited nature like mine; but I suppose I'd have got used to teetering on it same as the rest of you, only she made up her mind I was to quit—and quit I did. Mame runs *me!* I guess she'll try and run you too; she tries to run most any one that comes to hand. This is my shebang."

He stopped before a small cottage whose slender piazza was ornamentally fenced in with heavy wooden scroll work, and, opening the front door, ushered the guest into the narrow hall. "Hello, Mame! Here's Prescott. Prescott—he's one of 'the boys,' you know."

"We're so glad to have you here," said Mrs. Brenner, a stout young woman in a light blue flannel shirt-waist; she had prettily untidy hair, large gentle brown eyes, and small, very soft hands. She brushed the light strands of hair out of the way with a pretty gesture of one hand, while she extended the other to Prescott. He felt an instant sensation of comfort, increased when he found himself finally settled in an armchair in a room that reflected the mistress of it in a sort

of warm, attractive disorderliness. A work-basket, with the sewing half out of it, occupied a footstool; the table, lighted by a lamp with a pictorial shade, was piled high with magazines and papers; a banjo sprawled on the sofa amid the tumbled pillows, and a child's pink worsted sock and a china cat lay in front of the bright little kerosene stove in the middle of the floor.

Mrs. Brenner followed his gaze towards the infant's belongings and blushed as she laughed.

"Harve won't let me pick them up! Isn't it silly of him?"

"I believe she puts them there herself, because she thinks I like it," said Brenner serenely. "Oh, she's up to tricks! She sent me for you to-night. Do you remember the evening I spent at your house five years ago? The night I had the cold, and your wife put the mustard plaster on me?"

"Why so she did," said Prescott delightedly. "I'd forgotten you'd seen my wife and the children. Let me see—there were only two of them—Margaret's four years old."

"It was the hottest mustard plaster I ever felt," said Brenner reminiscently. "I went to sleep with it on. When I woke up—I guess I was sort of dazed—I thought the house was on fire, and started to run down-

stairs, but Mrs. Prescott caught on in some way, and sent you to head me off. Hottest mustard plaster I *ever* felt. Well, your wife was mighty good to me. Not so very rugged-looking though herself, as I remember."

"Oh, she's very strong," said Prescott, with defensive hauteur; "very. She's never ill." He turned the conversation towards the Brenner ménage. "And how old is your child?"

But he found himself, later, confiding in Mrs. Brenner, after the cozy little supper in the rag-carpeted dining-room, where she had set out hot mince pie and cheese and cookies, and Brenner had made the coffee. Prescott, who owned the impaired digestion of the travelling man, had long passed the stage of taking whiskey to supplement all deficiencies, arriving at the final attitude of the invariable soft boiled eggs for breakfast and rare roast beef for dinner, but to-night he had recklessly refused to take sickly thought for the morrow. Mame's pie was good.

Brenner was sitting now cross-legged on the sofa, strumming obliviously on the banjo, while Prescott, his arms on the dining-table, leaned towards Mrs. Brenner's sympathy. Something in this warm home atmosphere was too much for him.

"She—I—there're some things you can't

talk about, Mrs. Brenner. Now, the other night my wife had to get up at two o'clock in the morning and go out over the snow to the doctor's; Martin, that's my boy, was taken sick. Little Emma wouldn't let her mother go alone—she's only nine. My wife wrote me that it didn't scare her a bit, but it does seem sort of pitiful—doesn't it?—to think of their doing it. It's never happened before, but the neighbours we used to have moved away."

"Oh, you mind it more than she would," said Mrs. Brenner encouragingly. Her soft eyes made a temporary home for him.

"Things seem to tell on her more than they used, though she tries hard not to let me see it. She's always worrying about me, in this kind of weather, for fear I'll come down with something alone in a hotel. But my wife"—Prescott paused a moment awkwardly—"my wife's awfully *good;* I'm not that way myself, Mrs. Brenner, but I don't think I would care for a woman that wasn't religious. She thinks everything is *meant.* And it helps her a lot."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Brenner. She added after a little silence: "Was your boy very ill?"

"Ill? No; he was all right the next day. But she caught cold; she doesn't think enough

of herself; she's that kind, you know. It's clear foolishness! Last time I was home I found that when the girl left—we had one for six years and have been changing hoodlums every fifteen minutes since she married—well, when the last one left I found she'd been carrying up the coal for the fires because the boy got tired, and she was afraid it would hurt him. Husky little beggar, I'd tire him all right! He's just getting to the age when he's too much for his mother—nothing wrong about him, but he worries her. He slings his books at the brakemen when he goes in to school on the train and gets complained of—and he smokes cigarettes around the corner and the neighbours come and tell her, and it breaks her all up."

"He needs a man," said Mrs. Brenner.

"Yes. But you see I'm home so seldom she can't bear to have me down on the children the only time I'm with them. You see, a man doesn't think much whether he likes to travel or not—it's just something that's got to be done, if you're in the business—but it's hard on a woman. Some women seem to get used to it, though."

"Ah," murmured Mrs. Brenner, "when we married I said to my husband: 'When I get over caring for you, then I'll get over minding your leaving me—and not before.'"

"Why, that's what my wife says!" said Prescott. He laughed, with a rising colour, and shook his head. "You women—you're all alike. You don't know what lots of good it's done me to be here and talk to you to-night; it's most as good as being home—not quite, though."

"Can't you stop travelling?" said Mrs. Brenner, going with penetrative instinct to the thought she felt. She added, after a pause: "Are you sure you can't?"

He looked at her uncertainly. "How did you know that? No, I'm not sure I can't—but I'm not sure I can. And I'm not so young as I was."

"Think of it." Her hand gave his a warm clasp; through her eyes he saw his wife. "*Think* of it."

"God knows I do," said Prescott huskily. His hand wrenched hers in its farewell, before he put on the overcoat Brenner brought him from the back hall.

All the way back to the hotel he was thinking over things. It all depended on that few hundred dollars extra, so absolutely necessary that, without it, he could not provide a shelter for his family. More than a living he no longer planned for. He looked at the future with the eye of the man who, whatever his abilities, has come to learn that, either from

early training, or environment, or the iron bands of need, more than a careful living can never be his. He could have enjoyed riches as well and more than many another man, but they were so out of all calculation that what they could buy no longer aroused in him any particular interest. He would never even be able to indulge in that pathetically ludicrous dream of the business man of retiring to a green and placid land and raising catalogue produce from theory. He would be able to save little, after educating his children, but the money to pay the insurance that would keep his wife from penury when he died. For all his days he must work in harness, and take no holiday but that which Death gives to the great rank and file.

Yet, in spite of these limitations, for all that he tacitly renounced, he had good measure. He had the freedom of spirit which belongs to him who, given a competence, envies not any man his wealth or his opportunity. He had gained a capacity for getting great and far-reaching happiness from the exquisite little joys of life. If he had a little of the inner sadness that comes of foregoing the ambitions natural to a man, it was not the sadness of defeat, but rather the thoughtful weighing of the loss as the least—all things considered—that he could have had. In the silent times

of those long journeyings by day and night over the earth, the pricelessness of the common blessing of a home had sunk deeper and deeper into his soul. And the spring of all this was in the love he and his wife had for each other, a love that was too much of a vital power to be consciously dwelt upon; it was rather an enlarging and enriching of the whole nature because they two were one in the possession of a country which it is given to but few of the married to see even afar off. Below all trouble lay ever a secret joy; whither he went, she companied him. In all the years of separation, they were less apart than many whose hands meet daily; there could be no real separation between them even after death.

But now—but now—she was getting tired. Her small face with its pure outlines, the sweet, nervous mouth and the loving eyes came before him—her low controlled voice, her quick motions, her rapid adjustment of all domestic problems that his brief stay at home might be bright and restful, the children at their best, the meals most home-like, and she herself dressed prettily, with the work so ordered that she might not lose a minute of his society. If callers came on one of those precious afternoons, she rebelled as if at a calamity. She had always been so brave,

so helpful, but she was not so strong as she had been, and the boy was too much for her. If he could but see his way a little clearer! He had the cautiousness of methods new to him that comes of the inexperience of manhood, far more frustrating than the inexperience of the boy.

Brenner came around the next day just before train time.

"Mame sent me," he explained. "She's been talking to me ever since you left. She's got a brother in New York who's in the line you're looking up, and she has an idea you can fix up something with him in connection with the position you were telling me of. If you can carry some of his business with you I don't see but it would help you out mighty well. He's a good man—and he'll do anything for Mame, if he *can* do it. She's written him a letter, and here's one for you."

"I'm much obliged, I'm sure," said Prescott politely. He did not speak with enthusiasm; he had a rooted distaste for a woman's intervention in business matters, and by daylight his evening confidences rather annoyed him. Still ——

"A telegram for you, sir," said a boy, coming up.

Prescott took it and opened it mechanically.

He stood for a moment with his eyes glued to the paper, and when he looked up Brenner cried in horror:

"Not your *wife*, man!"

"No," said Prescott thickly. "It's little Margaret." He consulted the paper. "She's not dead—yet. She's been run over. She may not be so badly hurt as they fear. My God! I can't get there for two days!"

"Thank heaven the east-bound train's on time," said Brenner devoutly, and went home to be cheered by his Mame.

"Papa is to carry little Margaret up-stairs—think of it!—dear papa to carry her—such a treat! His arms are so much stronger than mamma's." It was a week since the day of the telegram.

"Mamma jiggles," said the child roguishly, looking backward from the shelter of her father's arms to the slender figure toiling up laboriously with shawls and pillows. "Mamma carries Marget all slippy."

"Poor mamma," said the father; "she has to do everything when I'm not here." He pressed his lips to the soft baby cheek of the little girl who was getting well, but his thought was with the mother. "Now what on earth are you lugging all those things up for, Annie? Didn't I tell you to

call Martin to take them? You know you're all worn out."

"He's reading, and I thought I wouldn't disturb him."

"Where's that magazine I had? *There* you go again! Why *don't* you let the children wait on you?"

"I knew *just* where it was," said the wife with eager excuse.

"Well, it's their business to know where things are," said Prescott severely; "they don't help you half enough. When I go away to-morrow ——"

The joy in his wife's face went out as the light is snuffed out in a candle.

That evening, as they sat alone together in the cozy library after the children were in bed, she broke into the conversation with a tone that showed the effort. "I haven't asked you yet what time you want breakfast to-morrow morning. I hope you don't have to take the six-fifty, it's so very dark and early, and you never really eat anything, no matter what I get for you."

Prescott looked at the pure outline of her cheek and brow, and the stricken cheerfulness of her eyes. He hardly seemed to hear her words for a minute, and then answered absently:

"No; I'm not going so early to-morrow.

Hark, is that somebody coming up our steps?"

"Oh, I *hope* it's no one to call! It would be dreadful when it's our last evening together. No, thank goodness! It's next door."

"When I've been home five whole days that you didn't count on, you oughtn't to stand out for such a little thing as the last evening. It was well I could come—wasn't it? When I got that telegram ——"

He broke off with a shudder, and their hands clasped. Their minds traversed the past week with its terror and anxiety, and its later joy—the great happiness which comes from no new phase, but from the blessed continuance of the unnoticed daily good.

"You have been in town so much of the time," she murmured half-jealously.

"Yes, I know. It was necessary."

"You haven't told me yet what time you want your breakfast."

"Oh, any old time. I don't think I'll go in the morning."

"Why didn't you say so before?" She looked at him reproachfully. "Then I would have hired Maria for the day. Now I'll have to spend a lot of time in the kitchen when I'll want to be with you."

"How would you behave if I were to stay home all the time?"

"How would I behave?" She gleamed at him with sudden sweet tremulous humour through the mistiness of her eyes. "I'd never come near you. I'd make calls and belong to all the societies in the place and not get back until after dinner-time. I'd go next door in the evening and leave you home reading. I'd behave the way other women do whose husbands come home every night. I expect I'd get tired of seeing you around. Don't you believe it?" The gaiety in her tone flickered and went out, as if she were very, very tired. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I know you've been considering that offer—*you* didn't tell me of it—and you've refused it. I've been watching you. And I don't see how I'm going to let you go this time."

"Annie!"

"Oh, forgive, forgive me! I'll be brave again, I will indeed. But I've been through so much lately that just now—it gets so hard—so hard"—her voice was almost inaudible—"harder and harder. I've been praying—and *praying*."

"Annie, dear, you're all wrong. I'm not going to-morrow or Tuesday either. Can't you guess?"

She lifted her head from his shoulder and pushed him from her. "How queer you act! What do you *mean?*"

He tried to bend a jovial gaze upon her.

"I'm not going to travel any more, Annie, ever. You were all wrong; I've taken the offer. I went to see Mrs. Brenner's brother in town. I tell you that little woman in Wisconsin did you a mighty good turn! And I've taken the chances. I've figured it all out." He tried to gather her to him, but she drew back. "Why, Annie, aren't you glad? What makes you shake so?"

"You are going to stay *now?*"

"Yes, always. I'm going to look after my children and my—sweet—wife. Why *Annie!* Oh, you poor, *poor* girl, has it been as bad as *that?*"

He tried once more to draw her to him, but she eluded his grasp and was gone. He heard her light footfall above and then there was only silence.

He sat there by the table for a few minutes with a book before him, as he smoked, but he did not read. Once he went to the door and called "Annie!" softly, that little Margaret might not be wakened, and yet again, "Annie! Come down; I want to read to you," but there was no response.

He lingered a moment hesitatingly, and

then went up the stairs himself, his feet pausing half-reluctantly on the steps. Thrice he halted, and then went on again into the room where she was a kneeling figure by the bed, her arms spread out upon it, and her hair falling over her shoulders. She raised her head momentarily with a backward glance of rapt joy at him before burying it again in the coverlet, and as his footfalls stopped on the threshold she held out one arm appealingly as if to encircle him beside her.

"No—no!" he said painfully. "No, Annie! I—I can't—it wouldn't be right. Annie, you don't want *me*, dear; you don't want—— *No!*"

Her white hand still mutely pleaded. Even at the very gate of heaven she could not be satisfied without him. He drew nearer, and a little nearer. Then, somehow, he had stumbled down awkwardly into the warm enclosure of her arm, and hid his face within her bosom.

The Hinge

The Hinge

"MRS. RANNEY is going away to-morrow with the children to visit her mother; did you hear that? It will be a nice change for her, she's alone so much, with Mr. Ranney nearly every evening at the Rowing Club or at that old hotel. Goodness knows how late he'll stay out after she's gone! I shouldn't think she'd like it *at all.*"

The four women who were neighbours on the Ridge were coming back from a meeting of the Vittoria Colonna Club, picking their way in gala attire over the puddles left by a shower, with the aid of the two parallel see-sawing boards that made the suburban sidewalk. Mrs. Stone, who had spoken, was tall and large-featured; she wore a startlingly wide, high-plumed hat that seemed to have no connection with her head, rearing into strange shapes with the wind that blew from the sea.

"Perhaps she's glad to have him out of the house," suggested the fair, prettily garbed little Mrs. Spicer, who talked very fast. "Not that he's dissipated at all, I don't mean that,

but I think he's one of those horrid domineering men you'd hate to have around. I don't believe he ever gives her a cent of money—*he* is always so well-dressed, but she hasn't had a new thing since she came here a year ago. I'd like to see Ernest Spicer treat me that way!"

"Mrs. Ranney says she likes him to take a walk after dinner; that he's used to it," interpolated the handsome, brown-eyed Mrs. Laurence, with a characteristic lift of her white chin. "He often asks her to go with him."

"Oh, yes, so she says!" Mrs. Stone made a clutch for her hat. "Of course she *acts* satisfied; you can't tell anything by that. She's a dear little woman, but I don't believe there's much to her; he's a great deal above her as far as brains go, that's evident. Keep over this side, Mrs. Spicer, that maple is just dripping. But there's very little warmth or cordiality in Mrs. Ranney as far as I can see; she doesn't respond as you'd think she would. I ran over the other day when she happened to be out, and Ann let me see her preserve-closet. When I spoke to her the next day about the number of jars she had, she almost made me feel as if I had been intrusive. Some people have that unvarying manner, always pleasant, but noth-

ing more. It wears on *me*, I know, and I shouldn't wonder if it did on Mr. Ranney; I think he feels a lack in her."

"Oh, it's such a great subject!" said little Mrs. Spicer with earnest volubility, "it's such a great subject, that of being attractive to one's husband. Miss Liftus spoke so feelingly about it the other day at the Club, she says that women are so engrossed in their own affairs that they neglect to adapt themselves to the husband's life; she thinks intelligent coöperation in business matters should be the key-note. It's a lovely idea; I know a woman who is in her husband's office, and they enjoy it so much, but"—Mrs. Spicer paused wistfully—"it's very hard to help a man when he's in stocks, like Ernest Spicer; I *can not* seem to remember quite what it is when he's on a margin; I've had it explained to me so many times I am ashamed to ask him any more; I seem to understand it just for a minute, and then it goes. I don't know what's the reason, but Ernest never wants to talk about business with me."

"Don't you think husbands are very different?" asked Mrs. Budd with a slow distinctness, as if she were reading from a primer; her large, unwavering blue eyes pinned your butterfly attention fast in spite of involuntary writhings. "I know my hus-

band and Mr. Ranney are very different, they like such different things for breakfast. I am very particular about Mr. Budd's meals, and he depends so much on his breakfast. He always begins on——"

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," interrupted Mrs. Stone impatiently, she knew Mr. Budd's *ménu* by heart. "You can adapt and adapt and they'll never know it, but they do know when they're comfortable. Nobody can say that Mr. Stone isn't comfortable in his own house. When I see a man like Mr. Ranney leaving his home every evening you may be sure there's a screw loose somewhere. That little woman is making a great mistake, but it's the kind of thing you'd find it difficult to speak about."

"Oh, I wouldn't speak about it for the world!" cried Mrs. Laurence in horror. "As Mrs. Budd says very truly, people are so different." Yet she found herself wondering afterwards. She was sure that the Ranneys were fond of each other in a way, though she wouldn't have cared for the way. On what hinge hung Mr. Ranney's neglect of his wife? A lack in her, as Mrs. Stone had said, selfishness on his part—coldness on hers? Mrs. Laurence herself didn't need to discuss her attraction for Mr. Laurence—in their case it was something inherent, not an

accident of adjustment; it interpenetrated every condition of life. She had put a blue bow in her hair when she dressed, because she had a theory that a woman should look her nicest for her husband, but as a matter of fact she knew that Will thought her beautiful in anything she wore.

Mrs. Ranney always looked nice, there could be no two opinions on that. She was a slight, very young woman, with a heart-shaped, childish face, that wore an expression of gentle, matronly dignity, repelling to familiarity. She had serious, flower-blue eyes, and quantities of waving, chestnut-brown hair coiled back so tightly from a broad, low forehead that you hardly realized at first that when it was let down it formed a beautiful, shimmering cloak around her that nearly touched the floor. Her whole personality was intensely feminine. In any demand of the day her simple gowns became her, yet were never too fine for the work her busy fingers found to do, for Mrs. Ranney was a housewife and a sewer of garments; she even helped vegetables as well as flowers to grow with a quiet inborn capability that showed in whatever she undertook. She was known to be tender-hearted; the suffering of others seemed to hurt her very flesh. When that little bruiser, Herbert Ranney,

fell and bumped his head, Mrs. Ranney would fly white and breathless from the house, and clasp him to her breast in a wild effort to fight off this thing that was attacking her child. She couldn't *stand* it that a child should suffer.

Yet she had, at unexpected moments, a roguish sense of humour that set her serious blue eyes dancing mischievously; when she got laughing, as had happened, half inaudibly, so that she was helpless to stop herself, she was as provocatively charming as a lovely child. Her husband had been once heard to state that he had never expected to marry, having lived until the age of thirty-six contentedly a bachelor, but that when he met "that rascal there," she bowled him over on the spot. It certainly was a fact that, though she was so hard to get acquainted with, every man admired Mrs. Ranney.

Women, as a rule, did not care much for Mr. Ranney, perhaps, because he used towards them a gallant deference so evidently given them as a sex that it piqued by ignoring any personal claim to his attention. In appearance he was large and heavily built, smooth-shaven, with fine intellectual features, and hair and brows of blue black; his square chin was almost aggressively assertive. A

man of semi-nautical tastes, he had at times almost a quarter-deck manner alike to barking dogs, poaching cows and trivial or unauthorized approach from his fellows. With the men who were his friends he was reputed to be a charming companion, witty, genial, and whole-hearted; the wives took the fact on hearsay, with some suspicion. Mrs. Laurence felt a distinct sense of resentment as, sitting on her piazza after dinner she saw him coming up the steps, natty and immaculate in his blue flannels, pipe in hand—he was actually going to leave his wife alone on the eve of her departure. He doffed the peaked, gold-banded cap of his boating club.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Laurence. Is Laurence anywhere around?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, he's never far off when I'm here," returned Mrs. Laurence incautiously, with what she felt was almost too much meaning for politeness; she saw Mr. Ranney's left eyebrow go up a little with quizzical effect; it made her feel hot. "Your wife leaves to-morrow, I believe. How is she to-night after all her packing?"

"Mrs. Ranney is quite well, I think," said Mr. Ranney in a tone that in spite of its apparent politeness placed a wedge between himself and his personal affairs, though Mrs. Laurence still persevered.

"You will miss her dreadfully after she goes."

"Oh, Minda will look after me," said Mr. Ranney coolly. Minda was a capable old coloured woman who worked for the neighbourhood. "Hello, Laurence!" His voice changed to one of good fellowship. "Want to walk down with me and take a look at Harker's boat?"

"No, I think I'd better not," said Mr. Laurence lingeringly, his long figure coming into view in the semi-darkness of the summer evening. He really did not care to go, "the boys" bored him; an uncut magazine, with his wife for audience had been pleasantly ahead of him after the work of the day; yet such is the power of attraction from man to man, so much greater than that from woman to woman, that he almost felt as if he wanted to be Ranney's companion if Ranney wanted him. It was the Call of the Wild. Past experience warned him clear of those mistakenly jocular words, "my wife won't let me"—he put his hand caressingly on the back of her chair as he said: "I don't think I'll leave Anna this evening, we're finishing a serial together."

"Oh, very well," responded Mr. Ranney. He put on his cap as he went down the steps again, lit his pipe, and walked off with that

air of jaunty and masterful freedom that in its way was an offense to the marital traditions of the street; it subtly discredited his wife, it seemed to undermine the generous, dual obligations of a home. And to-night ——

"*Pig!*" said Mrs. Laurence, with an indignation that hurled the adjective after him like a stone. "If you didn't consider me any more than that, Will —— Wait a moment." She ran impulsively over to the next house, quickly forestalling the invitation she saw on Mrs. Ranney's lips, as the latter came to the door in her white gown, a book in her hand.

"No, I thank you, I can't come in—Mr. Laurence is waiting for me at home. How tired you look! *Won't* you come over and sit with us a while? We'd love so much to have you—and I'll make some lemonade. We feel that we won't see anything of you for so long."

"Oh, thank you!" said Mrs. Ranney. She looked surprised. "You're very kind, but I think I'll stay here and rest, if you don't mind; I thought I'd just read a little before I went to bed; you see I have everything packed, and we don't go until after lunch to-morrow." She seemed to cast around for something more to say. "I read a good deal in the evenings when Mr. Ranney is out; I haven't any time during the day."

"It takes a great deal of time to keep up with the magazines," sympathized Mrs. Laurence.

"I don't know much about the magazines —Mr. Ranney doesn't care for them. I've been reading the Bible through this year, I always intended to when I had a chance," said Mrs. Ranney simply. "I found it very interesting. Mr. Ranney thinks a good deal of Homer, too; I've just finished the 'Odyssey.' *Won't* you come in?"

"No, no, I can't," returned Mrs. Laurence hastily. "Is that the 'Iliad' you have there?"

"No," said Mrs. Ranney. Her eyes gleamed dancingly with sudden mischief; she leaned forward with roguish defiance. "I'll tell you what this is—it's the 'Thompson Street Poker Club!'" She relapsed into one of her lovely, helpless fits of half-inaudible laughter in which Mrs. Laurence joined perforce, and the two women held on to each other for mutual support, in feminine fashion.

Mrs. Ranney went away the next day at one o'clock, trim and pretty in her blue travelling suit; the women who flocked to bid her good-bye were profuse in offers of caring for Mr. Ranney, but she only thanked them with gentle unresponsiveness, and said that Minda would look after him quite well.

It was strange what a difference her departure seemed to make at once in the aspect of the little house; a shadow had fallen over it, a visible grayness of desolation touched it, mistlike; the embowering vines drooped like the adjuncts of a cemetery; there was a curious deadness about the very hang of the curtains, one could see from without, and the half-lowered shades. The very fact of the front doors being closed set the seal of strangeness upon it. A spirit, so vitally sweet, so informing that even inanimate objects reflected it, had departed and left only the cold and empty shell behind, not alone to the intimate heart, but to even the casual observer.

"Really, I hate to look over there," confided Mrs. Spicer to Mrs. Stone. "Minda came into our kitchen a while ago, she said she could hardly stay in the place, she felt just as if Mrs. Ranney and the children were dead. I'm sorry she felt that way. I had the most peculiar feeling myself when I saw her go. Forebodings are so —— Well, of course, you don't believe in them, but you don't like them. I've just taken some of my nerve tonic. I can hardly blame Mr. Ranney if he stays out till all hours now."

The watching neighbourhood could hardly believe it when eight o'clock struck—half-

past eight—and no Mr. Ranney walked jauntily down the street, immaculately attired, with his gold-banded yachting cap on the side of his head. He was known to have come home to his dinner, and afterwards the smoke of his pipe had risen from the verandah. Laurence, urged thereto by his wife, lounged finally up to the door-step to find Ranney sitting there in a disreputable pongee coat, with an old, gray felt basin on his head, smoking, with his shoulders hunched forward and his eyes fixed sombrely before him. He only nodded at Laurence's greeting, and made room on the steps beside him.

"There's a chair up there, if you want it."

"No, this does well enough," said Laurence. "How is the election going on?"

"The election?" Mr. Ranney's eyes sought for a connecting clue. "Oh, yes, of course, the Club election. I don't know how it's getting on, I don't care a hang how it goes. Did you see the weather report to-night, Laurence? They say there's a storm brewing up the coast, where my wife's gone. Those steamers are nothing but rotten old tubs; it's only a question when they'll go to Davy Jones if a storm hits them. The *Peerless* foundered three years back, you remember. When I think of that girl and her two babies out there to-night in that old

Patriot, with nothing but a plank between them and the bottom—I tell you I'll be glad to get a wire to-morrow night and know they're all right. I've gone all to pieces thinking of it; lost my nerve completely."

"Couldn't they have gone by rail?" asked Mr. Laurence practically.

"Oh, yes, they could, but—they'd have to stop off on the way, and then—— Well, I *wanted* her to, but she thought it took too much money."

"But if you insisted on her taking it?"

"Insisted on her taking it! Why, man alive, she has it all, that's the trouble; I hand all the funds over to that rascal, else we'd never have a penny. Oh, there's always plenty for me when I want it, but she won't spend it on herself. I can't make her. But I'll get even with her some day, you see if I don't. I'll plunge her into extravagance. What's that shutter slamming for? I tell you I don't like the way the wind is rising. When I think of that girl and her two babies——"

"Why don't you come over on our piazza and sit awhile?" suggested the visitor; to keep rolling over and over on a wheel of marital sympathy embarrassed him.

"No, I thank you, I rather think I'll turn in early," said Ranney, rising as the other

had done. Mr. Laurence hurried home to his wife, childishly eager to startle her with his piece of news. Ranney was going to bed at nine-of-the-clock.

"Well, I'm glad he's missed her for one evening," she retorted viciously. "It won't last, though."

But the next night when she happened to stroll over to the dividing fence in the half gloom, she discerned a figure sitting on the steps. He rose and came slowly forward, as she spoke, removing the old felt basin from his head perfunctorily.

"It looks very lonely over here without Mrs. Ranney and the children," she said.

"Yes, it does," answered Mr. Ranney. He knocked his pipe ruminatively on the top rail. "I didn't realize before what a helpless being a man is without his wife; I never can remember where she keeps the clean towels."

"I suppose she felt that she needed the change," suggested Mrs. Laurence, a little stiffly.

"Oh, I persuaded her to go. She didn't want to leave me, but a girl has to see her family sometimes; it's only right." He took a long breath. "It's only *right*. When the letter came I said she ought to go, I said: 'Jean, *I* can get along; your place this sum-

mer is with your father and mother.' She's only been home once since I took her away —her family don't like it very much. I had a hard time to get the scamp—regular stern-chase; but a man thinks a good bit more of a girl when he has to work to get her."

"Yes, indeed," responded Mrs. Laurence, though she didn't think so at all—she adored the dear knowledge that she and Will had loved within five minutes by the watch. And to marry a woman and never care like this until she was gone! The thought gave her a shiver, as she confided later to her own husband, with her hand in his. Suppose Mr. Ranney's appreciation of his little lonely wife had come too late?

Hereafter, night after night, the wondering Ridge beheld the deserted husband, disreputably attired, sitting upon his piazza steps or pacing up and down the narrow walk, keeping guard like a faithful dog who has been left to watch. Every evening, some man, urged thereto by his wife, strolled over to keep him company, though the rambling conversation always harked back to Mrs. Ranney through every masculine theme. The street grew to feel a distinct proprietorship that gave a sense of daily responsibility, and it grew even stronger, when, as time went on, he became gradually taciturn and

moody, with a manner that said plainly that he preferred his own company to that of any friends, however well-meaning.

"Well, I'm glad Mrs. Ranney is coming home next week," said Mrs. Spicer feelingly, as she and Mrs. Laurence stopped on a street corner in the village for a heart-to-heart talk. "I don't know what would become of that poor man if she stayed away much longer. How much we will have to tell her!"

"Minda says he hardly eats a thing," said Mrs. Laurence.

"He ate a little of the pudding I sent over last night. His devotion is really beautiful, but I don't quite like his state of mind, it makes me anxious, and his appearance is so——" Mrs. Spicer paused uncomfortably. "I wish he'd shave! Ernest Spicer says he hates to be seen in the street with him."

"Well, she'll be home soon," said Mrs. Laurence.

That was a fearsome night indeed, and one long to be remembered, the night before Mrs. Ranney was expected home. A wild September gale sent the deluge of rain aslant through the darkness, swirling it over lawns and among the trees into a river-torrent that carried all before it. It was a shrieking gale that tore up the houses with maniac fingers, wresting off shutters and chimney tops, drag-

ging down trees in its giant fury, howling and whining between the shrieks like a forest of spectral wolves rushing ever faster and faster upon their prey. The rain beat in through window-casing and foundation, front doors flew open wide at the hand of the tempest. The steeple of the church came crashing down; the orphan asylum was unroofed; the affrighted fancy soared into realms of terror with the far-clanging sound of the fire-bell, caught and lost again amid the clamour of the storm.

No one slept on the Ridge that night; mothers sat by the bedside of their little children, fathers patrolled the house to see that timbers held, and the fire was kept low. There was not a household near the Ranneys' in which some member had not said awesomely to another:

"And she is out on the ocean!" Imagination pictured the husband (as indeed Minda described him afterwards), walking up and down, up and down, up and down, with savage, miserable eyes, all night long, desperately fighting with agonized thoughts.

But, with the first sullen rays of the morning light he was gone. The tempest had abated into a fog-filled, engulfing rain, that washed all the landscape into a dirty yellow. The street on the Ridge was flooded from end

to end, so that a canoe might paddle down it; but the women who lived on the same side of the way ventured with rain-coats and overshoes into each others' houses to compare notes of the night, and to commune tearfully on the news of the morning papers. It was rumoured that the *Patriot* had foundered with all on board. "That girl with her two babies"—suppose she could never know. All that day men and women stood in line by the offices of the Nor-Coast Steamship Company, waiting, waiting, waiting for the word that meant life, or the losing of it. The "extras" with scare-lines about the *Patriot* with letters a foot long, were thrust before the eyes, or called in the ears of that waiting throng that thinned and fluctuated and filled up again. The extras even reached the Ridge. But at five o'clock Mr. Laurence brought home word that the *Patriot's* passengers had been transferred from the sinking steamer to the ship of another line, and were expected in by seven.

It was something after ten when the travellers arrived in one of the station cabs. The dwellers in the different houses had been excitedly on the lookout ever since dinner, congregating in Mrs. Laurence's drawing-room, the women overflowing with excited sentiment, and the men, excited too, discussing

the different aspects of the disaster. Minda had been overwhelmed with offers of help, and numberless dishes sent over to her for the refreshment of the wayfarers—jellies, creamed chicken, biscuit and layer cake, and many instructions given.

"Be sure and have the coffee just ready to put on," Mrs. Stone had directed, in the very kitchen itself. "Mr. Ranney will feel the need of it as well as Mrs. Ranney after all the strain he has been through; and be sure and keep the two kettles boiling. I have sent for my rubber water-bags, as well as Mrs. Spicer's, so that in case of chill or collapse we may have enough. One cannot tell what the effect of all that terrible exposure may have been. People have had their arms and legs frozen off in a shipwreck," said Mrs. Stone, with a slight confusion as to the time of year.

The house was alight and welcoming as the carriage, its lamps leering mistily through the fog, lurched to a halt in the splashing flood by the curb; half a dozen hands were reached out to carry the sleeping children, and the luggage, and help the travellers.

"Why, how kind of you all to be here!" said Mrs. Ranney's sweet, low voice, in gentle surprise. She looked younger than one remembered as they all crowded into the little drawing-room; though her beautiful hair

was slightly dishevelled under her hat, and her face was pale, her brow was as serene as ever.

"Oh, we're *so* glad to have you back again," cried Mrs. Spicer, with hysterical inflection, embracing the newcomer. "I don't know what Mr. Ranney would have *done* if you'd stayed away another day!"

"Oh, no trouble about *me*," disclaimed Mr. Ranney loftily. He deposited a bundle of shawls in the centre of the room as he spoke and took them up again restlessly. "Where do you want these put, Jean?—I told Mrs. Ranney that I could have got along without her just as well as not for another two weeks, but she wanted to get home."

"Yes, I thought I'd better," assented Mrs. Ranney.

"You've been through so *much*," said Mrs. Laurence pitifully. Her hand and Mrs. Ranney's gripped, unseen. "To be in that storm on that sinking ship, with those two babies—I can't begin to tell you how we've felt about it; how anxious ——" her voice broke.

"Now, now, now, a little blow like that amounts to nothing," said Mr. Ranney, with irritating contemptuousness. He had the offensive quarter-deck manner. "The passengers were transferred from one steamer to another simply for convenience in transporta-

tion. There was not the slightest danger at any time; nothing in the *world* to be excited about!"

"No indeed," corroborated Mrs. Ranney. She followed the group of women who hovered towards the kitchen a moment later, her large, flower-blue eyes bent earnestly upon them. "What is it you were just saying, Mrs. Spicer? No, I don't think you'd better undress the children. I'll just let them sleep as they are, after slipping off their shoes; they're so tired. Mr. Ranney and Minda will carry them up-stairs. Please, Mrs. Stone, don't get any coffee for us—it's just as *kind* —I appreciate all the trouble you've taken, but we had dinner at the Astor House before we came out; we couldn't eat a thing now. And would you mind not saying anything more about the voyage? My husband doesn't like to talk about it. I think a good night's rest is what we all need."

"Well, it's evident they've no more use for *us*," said Mrs. Stone with a sigh of acquiescence as the sympathizers stood once more without the portals; the position was felt to be symbolic, yet after the first bewildered drop from exaltation there was only a faint offense left. Mrs. Stone voiced the general sentiment as she continued:

"There's one thing certain, Mr. Ranney

will never forget these last six weeks ; I don't care how he *talks*, he can't keep his eyes off her face. He has found out what his wife is, at last."

So deep was this feeling of certainty, that almost an electric, shuddering wave of horror passed over the Ridge the next evening when Mr. Ranney, natty and immaculate, his gold-banded yachting cap on the side of his head, pipe in hand, swung jauntily out of his front gate into the broad, white moonlight that lay along the street. Only Mrs. Laurence, from the contradictory evidence of her own deep love, had a sudden, sweet, half-smile-and-tear-ful divination, that he hadn't had the heart for freedom before, with his wife away. Her dear presence now was so pervasive that the whole town seemed like home to him because she was in it.

A Symphony in Coal

A Symphony in Coal

"DID you order the coal for the furnace yesterday?"

"No, by George! I forgot it." Mr. Laurence half paused, his tall figure arrested in the act of putting on his overcoat in the front hall, to which his wife had followed him, napkin in hand, from the breakfast table.

"Oh, *Will!* and I told you the day before, so that you'd have plenty of time." Mrs. Laurence's brows expressed tragic disappointment, her tone, if affectionate, was despairing. "I never saw any one like you, you never remember a thing I ask you to, any more. You don't seem to have a mind for anything but that old law business. You'll *have* to order the coal this morning."

"But, Nan"—Mr. Laurence, with his overcoat on and hat in hand, bent his fine, thin face over his watch. "I don't see how I can, possibly; I've an appointment in town, and I must go around by Herkimer Street on my way to the station to see if Lalor's got the papers he promised me."

"I thought you were going there to-night." Mrs. Laurence held the door-knob fast.

"I am, but I want the papers first. Couldn't you send one of the maids to order the coal?"

"Yes, I could, but I won't," said his wife. Her dark eyes flashed, her tone had the conscious defiance of the loved woman, who can trade on her charm enough to be belligerent if she feels like it. "It's got to the place where I see to every single article we eat or wear or use in this house *but* the coal! And I just won't order that. I told you about it three days ago and we *must* have it this morning, with all this snow on the ground, whether it makes you late for your appointment or not."

"Then let me go now," said Mr. Laurence tersely, putting aside the arms with which she sought to encircle him as he swooped hastily over to kiss her on his way out. The open door let in a rush of cold air, as almost visibly keen and sparkling as a scimitar, that clove the lungs for a moment, before it was closed behind him, and his wife went back to the breakfast table where her ten-year-old son awaited her to glean the information about his history lesson which he should have looked up for himself the day

before. It was, perhaps, the trouble with Mrs. Laurence that her brightness and her intelligence served to help only by taking the whole burden of a thing upon herself; it might be indeed the reason why Mr. Laurence's official duties in the household had dwindled down to the ordering of coal, and the minor courtesy of getting a glass of water for her himself before she went to bed; it might be because she had never been able to see him do anything without doing it too. In the days when he had ostensibly locked up for the night she always followed around after him to see that the windows and doors were really bolted, so that gradually he left it all to her; if he poked the fire she snatched up the poker from where he had laid it to do the work over again. If he were sitting down she carried her own chair near the lamp rather than draw his attention to her need. Yet, sometimes, she had begun to have a little hurt feeling that he let her do so much. As to this matter of the coal—she could have sent Teresa to Harner's, of course—it was before that revelling era of house-to-house telephoning on the Ridge—yet even at the thought she stiffened a little. There are certain unnoticed beams and girders that hold up an edifice; if one of these is out of plumb the whole building sags.

If Will really refused to order the coal he couldn't be quite her Will any more.

Mr. Laurence, leaving the house, had debated momently in which of two opposite directions he should proceed, then he turned up Herkimer Street; to get the papers from Lalor was part of that "business" which, to a man, comes first. The air did not mellow after that initial plunge into it, it became almost unbearably keen not only in the blue shadows that lay along the freezing snow, but even where the sunshine set it glittering. Half of the walks were shovelled to make a narrow, icy pathway, but where there were unoccupied lots the drifts lay white and high, broken only by the deep leg-prints of commuters. As he strode swiftly on men shot from several houses; a very fat man, a tall one, a short one, their black figures sprinting madly in line across the white expanse towards the sound of a train slowing into the station.

Mr. Laurence's brows contracted unconsciously—he ought to be on that train himself. If it were not for getting that paper from Lalor—the case was an important one, a good deal of Mr. Laurence's future depended on it; he had taken it up rather against the advice of his closest friends, they thought it would be impossible to win it, but

he had that little inner conviction, that intangible sense of mastery that often spells success. It gave him a nervous power that on occasion seemed to have no end, but just because it was a matter of highly strung nerves a tiny obstruction jarred them out of use; the tension was gone beyond immediate recall—it might take hours or days even to get the instrument back to that pitch—it might never get there. It was sometimes almost in the nature of self-preservation when he shut himself off from the minor pressure, the minor affairs. In this present instance, as he strode along his mind was bent on Lalor, whose former subordinate connection with the incriminated corporation seemed to have been forgotten by every one but himself. Lalor was a shifty, uncertain genius, not to be depended on, yet from whom some central facts would have to be wrested; the trouble was to keep hold of him; he required constant bolstering up.

"Why, Mrs. Lalor!"

Laurence stopped short as he nearly collided with a very slight woman, blown at him at the turn of the corner by a sweeping gale that devastated the sunshine. "Here, turn around for a moment until that blast is over."

He steadied her where she stood panting

and breathless, looking down at the top of her light-blue *chiffon* hat, which had rather a pale and chilly early-morning effect in connection with a tight-fitting tan jacket. In lieu of furs she wore a white, pink-flowered silk scarf tied around her throat, the long fringed ends depending below her waist. Her figure was that of a young girl, but when she raised her small, long-chinned face you saw that she was considerably older; there were innumerable fine wrinkles around her pretty eyes—which had a soft haze over them, as if she had cried a great deal—and her abundant fair hair seemed a shade or two lighter than any nature could have intended it. She had an indescribable effect of artificiality counteracted rather appealingly by something bright and courageous in her gaze. Opinion halted about Mrs. Lalor, who, as a Southern woman was not only alien in habit to the Northern community to which she had lately come, but was also looked upon debatingly by the small society of Southerners in the place, usually hospitably ready to welcome any one from home.

It was unquestionable that she came of a good family, which counted for very much, but it was rumoured that she had married against the family wishes. No one knew anything of Mr. Lalor—who, in appearance,

was a tall, handsome man with a drooping, reddish-brown mustache—except that he was unpleasingly dissipated and always in difficulties; it seemed to discredit his wife in some way that she lived with him. She had, besides a little flirting, attractive manner to men, a sort of an echo of past belleship, which might have been all right if she had a nice husband, but was felt to be a little stepping over the line when she hadn't. A few women averred that there was something in her that they really liked, of whom tender-hearted little Mrs. Ramsey was one, and her neighbour, Mrs. Laurence another. The latter was by nature both generous and romantic, and with an unselfish, intelligent insight into lives that were different from her own.

There was a trustfulness in Mrs. Lalor's attitude now which appealed to Laurence. He let go his hold of her as the wind subsided, to say:

"What are you out so early for this bitter morning? I'm just on my way to your house. Is Lalor in?"

"If you were going for those papers"—Mrs. Lalor began tugging at the breast of her jacket for a visible package—"My husband meant to bring them around last night, but he's in bed—with a cold." Every one knew what Mr. Lalor's "colds" implied. "I thought

you might need them to-day; I was so afraid I wouldn't catch you in time." She drew a sharp breath that showed how she had been hurrying.

"It was awfully good of you," said Mr. Laurence warmly, as they turned down another street together. "Lalor will be well enough to be seen this evening, I hope?"

"Yes, I'm sure he will," said Mrs. Lalor, in a tone that guaranteed it. "But I want to ask you, Mr. Laurence"—her face became suddenly fixed and expressionless—"in seeing that you get the evidence you want, my husband will not be—*prominent* in any way?"

"His name need not appear at all," said Laurence promptly. His arm hovered spasmodically near her as she went slipping and lurching alternately beside him—"*Take* care! You'd better not walk any farther."

"Oh, I have to go as far as Harner's to order a ton of furnace coal."

"I'll stop and order it for you, if that's all," said Mr. Laurence. His eyes, lightly comprehensive, took note of the clock in the church tower. "I've got a good five minutes before my train. You go straight home, Mrs. Lalor."

He looked down protectingly to meet her upward gaze, which was relieved and co-

quettish and yet, somehow, a little sad, as she answered:

"Well, if you will——! I never do anything for myself if there's a gentleman to do it for me."

He raised his hat before starting on, and when he looked back she waved her hand to him. The large advancing figure of Mrs. Stone—on her way home from wresting the early chop from the butcher—amply furred and heavily goloshed, her beaver hat as well as her face swathed in a thick, brown veil, threw into high relief the tawdry lightness of Mrs. Lalor's attire.

He recollected that if he ever objected to a thin jacket on his wife she invariably professed to be "warm underneath." Mrs. Lalor might also be warm underneath, but he had a masculine preference for having people *look* warm in winter-time.

Poor little woman! He shook his head as he thought of Lalor, with a quick compression of his lips. Then a long whistle from up the track sent him tearing ahead in the teeth of the wind, to thrust his head at last inside of Harner's office and call out:

"Send a ton of furnace coal to Mrs. Lalor, 36 Herkimer Street, and be quick about it," before settling down into that swift run back that carried him swinging up by the guard

rail onto the slippery steps of the last car, and out into that region where women and household matters are not.

The first thing Mrs. Laurence said when she came in at lunch time, after a morning spent abroad, was :

"How freezing cold this house is ! Hasn't the coal come yet, Teresa ? "

"No, ma'am."

"How provoking !" Mrs. Laurence stopped short in disgust. "I never saw such a place ; it's as much as your life's worth to get anything delivered when you want it. Is that Timothy I hear in the cellar now ? " Timothy was the furnace man of the Ridge. "Tell him not to let the fire go entirely out ; we'll have to manage it some way. If he comes back between two and three the coal will certainly be here then."

But two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock passed, and no coal wagon backed up to the sidewalk in front of the Laurences, though a succession of them passed funereally through the white street, *en route* for more fortunate householders. At a quarter after four she gave a joyful exclamation—one had stopped, at last, opposite her door ; but the joy was short-lived—the wagon honked further along, tentatively, until it stopped at Mrs. Spicer's half-way down the block.

In a minute more Mrs. Laurence could see the dark legs of alternate men outlined against the drifts, as they carried buckets of the precious fuel to the opening in the cellar at the side of the Spicer villa. Something seemed to shatter through her—an iconoclastic blast, that she had been striving to shut out. Could Will have possibly forgotten between the house and the station? But no, that could not be!

She dressed hastily, in the later stages of her toilet vibrating between the silver-decked dressing-table, and the window, from behind the curtains of which she took recurrent peeps. At her last look she ran hastily down the stairs and opened the front door for Mrs. Stone, who was temporarily garbed in a polo cap and her husband's spring overcoat, into the pockets of which she had thrust her hands.

"I saw you coming along! It's too cold to be kept waiting on anybody's door-step. Walk right in, tea will be ready in a moment."

"I thought I'd be sure to find you in now," said Mrs. Stone comfortably, shedding her masculine apparel in the hall on her way to the drawing-room where she established herself with the ease of custom in a Turkish chair by the gas logs. The Ridge was apt to assemble informally at Mrs. Laurence's for five o'clock tea; it was known that she really

had it whether there was any one there or not; there was always something pleasantly cosy about the little function.

Mrs. Stone watched her hostess lazily as she drew the low, china-laden table nearer the fire, and lighted the lamp under the brass kettle just brought in, her dark, graceful head bent over to watch it, and her hands showing very white against the dull red of her gown.

"It's such a relief to get in here," said the visitor, breaking the silence as she took the steaming cup of fragrant tea offered her, and helped herself to a tiny hot buttered scone, from a blue Canton dish. "They are getting in coal at the Budds' this morning, and now they're at it at the Spicers'—the noise nearly sets me crazy, the houses are so near together. O Mrs. Spicer, I didn't hear you come in!"

Mrs. Stone looked up with a start to see another visitor walking, unannounced, into the room, a little woman in a long fur wrap with a lace scarf thrown over her head. "I was just saying—perhaps you heard me—what a noise your coal makes when it's being put in."

"Oh, don't speak of it!" said Mrs. Spicer. She seemed to greet her hostess, shed her outer garments, perch herself on a little, straight-backed sofa, and take her cup of tea

at one and the same moment with a swiftness of movement accelerated in her further speech, which tumbled forth like a small cataract. "Don't speak of it, no one knows what I went through last summer, when you were at the seashore and *your* coal was laid in. I couldn't sit on the piazza *at all*, and the thermometer was in the nineties. At the end of the third day I nearly had nervous prostration. Ernest Spicer was really worried about me. *I* never find it any economy to lay in a stock of coal; you use it up so much faster; it seems as if you were paying out for enough to last you until you died, and then, just at the time you didn't count on taking the money for it you have to buy more. If we laid in a *mine* full in July we'd have to order coal in February."

"Well, I wish I were laying it in now," interposed Mrs. Laurence deftly, with a sigh. "Mr. Laurence ordered some this morning, and it hasn't come yet. I would have sent a message to Harner's, but I have been expecting the coal wagon every moment."

"I saw your husband speaking to Mrs. Lalor as I came back from the butcher's," said Mrs. Stone. She paused significantly. "Isn't she the most noticeable thing you ever saw! She never seems to have any morning clothes."

"I don't believe she has any money for new ones," suggested Mrs. Laurence gently.

"No, I don't suppose she *has*, but even then—— Of course, I'm sorry for her, we all are; every one knows what Mr. Lalor is, but do you know, the other day when I attempted to allude to all that she must have to bear up under—I felt so sympathetic towards her, after what the Bents told us—she stiffened up at once; she acted as if she hadn't the slightest idea of what I was driving at. Now *that's* absurd. To hear Mrs. Lalor talk about 'Bennie' you'd think he was the king-pin, as Mr. Stone expresses it."

"Oh, but I think that's really fine of her," said Mrs. Laurence, with proselyting zeal. "There's a courage, a devotion about her that always appeals to me; you can't help seeing that she's had such a hard time. I'm sure if you knew her better you'd like her."

"She may be devoted to her husband," said Mrs. Spicer very fast, "but if you'd see her going in on the train—Ernest Spicer says he always avoids her when he *can;* he does hate to be made conspicuous. I don't care whether she comes of a good family or not; *I* think she's common."

Mrs. Laurence shook her head wisely. "I'm sure that you're mistaken, not that

I'm so well acquainted with her myself, but still ——"

She took occasion later on to detain Mrs. Stone whisperingly a moment by the front door as both visitors were making their exit.

"I thought I wouldn't say it before *her* —but why don't you and Mr. Stone make a call at the Lalors to-night? Will has a little business with Mr. Lalor, and I'll go with him. *Do* come."

"Well, I'll see," temporized Mrs. Stone with a softening inflection.

Mrs. Stone was, as her hostess well knew, the kind of a person who, after disapproving publicly of a neighbour, privately sends her pickles. She hastened down the steps now to join her friend, her large, mannish figure in the overcoat and cap wobbling ludicrously on the narrow, slippery length of drift-bordered sidewalk under the gas-lamps that were already lighted.

The wind had gone down, but so had the mercury; the air was "bitter chill." As Mrs. Laurence turned back into her hall the atmosphere there seemed only a few degrees warmer. Gas logs made but slight impression on the general temperature of a house in this weather; the hand that she held over the register received but the faintest, scarce-warm breath upon it. Mrs. Laurence still

looked for a belated rattling coal-wagon, but the hour seemed long until her husband's return; her heart bounded romantically at the sound of his footsteps now, just as it had done when she was a girl. His face was ruefully smiling as he said after the kiss of greeting:

"You don't know what you've missed—all my fault, too! I bought you a two-dollar bunch of violets—— *Now wait* till I get through—and left them in the train."

"Oh, *Will!*" His wife's brows drooped tragically. "That's so like you! You're getting too absent-minded to live. My lovely violets!" she mourned tenderly.

"Isn't the house very cold to-night?"

"Well, I should *think* it might be! It's freezing." Mrs. Laurence's accumulated wrath poured forth. "There hasn't been a sign of the coal you ordered this morning, and I've been waiting for it all day. It's a perfect outrage, and I want you to tell Harner so, Will. You *did* order it, didn't you?"

"Why, ye——" An extraordinary expression stole over Mr. Laurence's thin face, it was as if his consciousness had been suddenly arrested in mid-air. Well as his wife knew his expressions and what they covered, this surprisingly baffled her. He drummed with

his finger-tips on the edge of the dressing-table before relaxing enough to say guardedly, after a moment:

"By George! I don't believe I did. I knew there was *something*—I'm awfully sorry, Anna, indeed I am."

"*You didn't order it!*—Will, please don't drum on things that way, you know it drives me wild. Well, if you can't remember one thing I ask you to do—if you can't keep a single promise that you make me—— It isn't the *coal* I care about—though my feet have been like stones all day—but it's the fact that I can't depend on you for *anything*. *Please* don't whistle. You can attend to business matters well enough, but when it comes to the comfort of your wife and child——" an unforeseen sob broke across the words. "Of course, it's been warm enough in your steam-heated office to-day. I'm glad it has been, I wouldn't have had you cold for anything." In spite of her tears she was following after him as he searched in his chiffonier drawer for a clean collar. "You've done it all so many times! You carried that important letter to Hetty in your pocket for six weeks before you told me."

"Yes, and if you're going on like this every time I tell you anything, I'll stop it," said Mr. Laurence doggedly. "You don't

give me any credit for owning up, Nan. You wouldn't know half the time when I make mistakes, if I didn't tell you."

"I don't see what else you could have said when I asked you if you had ordered the coal."

"I could have lied about it, I suppose," said Mr. Laurence impatiently.

"O Will!" she gasped with horror. Her white chin went up, her dark eyes looked at him full of agitation. She put her hands on his shoulders and shook him ineffectively. "You wouldn't—you *couldn't* do that! You always tell me the truth, don't you—all of it?"

"Usually," assented her husband. He had finished settling his tie and now put his arms around her. "But if it's going to make you any happier if I *don't*——"

"No, no, no! You know I never could mean that—never! I could forgive you anything as long as you told me the truth."

She clung to him as they went down to dinner together, and she forbore to allude to the state of the atmosphere, except by shivering once or twice—the gas logs sent forth a chill, blue flare. There was an odd return to that arrested, baffling expression on Mr. Laurence's face, however, when his wife announced her intention of going around to the Lalors' with him afterwards.

"Don't you think it is too cold for you to go out to-night?" he asked, and she answered with a playful gleam of the sarcasm she couldn't keep from using. "No, I think it's too cold for me to stay in."

It was a matter for ejaculating surprise on arriving at the Lalors' to find the unexpected Spicers instead of the Stones, who, however, appeared in a few minutes. Mr. Spicer had a slender, correct elegance of aspect, while Mr. Stone was large, grayish, and rather portly. Beside the Spicers, a Mrs. Frere and her son, a dumb, immature youth, were already in possession of the field. Mrs. Frere's position as a church worker carried her into connection with people whom she might not otherwise have met; the chief effect that she produced on every one now was an ardent desire that she should go. She sat in utter silence with folded hands, but her dumbness differed from that of her son in a patently avid appreciation of everything that was said or done.

Mrs. Lalor, in a low-throated, faded light green gown covered with beautiful old lace, was loud in expression of her surprise and delight at this haphazard gathering. Mr. Lalor, tall, handsome and with wandering dissipated eyes and the same droop alike to his reddish mustache and to his figure,

came forward also with hospitable welcome, while his wife volubly ordered not only him but the other men in behalf of her guests:

"Bennie, get that armchair out of the corner for Mrs. Laurence; be careful the top doesn't fall off of it—we break all our things moving so often! Mr. Stone, won't you put that footstool under Mrs. Spicer's feet, I'm sure she's not comfortable. Mr. Spicer, if you'll kindly move the table near me to make more room—Bennie, run upstairs and get the little feather hand-screen for Mrs. Stone—I know that lamp's shining in your eyes." She pronounced it "Shinin' in yo' eyes," with a caressing, indolent inflection to her soft voice. "It's not the least trouble for him, Mrs. Stone—Bennie always waits on me."

There was a seductive air of luxury about Mrs. Lalor in spite of the fact that the cheap, shabby upholstered chairs and sofa were profusely covered with cheaper "drapings" on such portions as were most subject to wear, and that the mantelpiece, also draped, was simply decorated with a single pink-mouthed grinning conch shell—yet the latter was indeed under an old, old painting of a low-browed woman whose white throat and rounded cheek gleamed out from rich brown shadows—a woman who, even thus dimly

seen, seemed to match the lace on Mrs. Lalor's gown.

"I only came because I thought you'd like me to," whispered Mrs. Spicer to Mrs. Laurence in a pause of the later conversation. Mrs. Stone gave an affectionate little squeeze to her neighbour's hand. "I thought Ernest would object, but he seemed quite willing. I wish that Mrs. Frere wasn't here, you have to be so careful what you say before her."

"We won't stay very long," murmured Mrs. Laurence assentingly. Mr. Lalor and her husband had apologetically disappeared behind closed doors to transact their business together, the latter with that last look at her over the heads of the others that meant their own special farewell. Mrs. Lalor had insisted on supplying every one with hot lemonade, on account of the coldness of the weather, calling the three men back and forth in her services and holding a little couet with them afterwards as she sat reclined in a rocking-chair.

"I reckon Mr. Eddie was right bored with only me to talk to before you all came in," she announced with a smile directed at young Mr. Frere. "You don't know how glad I am to see you gentlemen here. I enjoy gentlemen's society so much. Of course, I've always had it till I came up No'th, and I miss it so

much. I wish you could have seen our po'ch at home in the old times on a Sunday evenin', with my sister Mollie's friends, and Emma Lily's, and mine, all lined up waiting for us to come down."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Stone.

"I told Bennie when I married him I never could settle down to just one." Mrs. Lalor paused lightly. "I was engaged to six before that. But he always said—'George' my name is George—'I want you should enjoy gentleman's society just the same as you always did.' I was engaged first when I was fourteen."

"Oh, *Southern* engagements!" said Mrs. Laurence indulgently, with a gesture that disclaimed their seriousness of intent to Mrs. Stone's startled gaze. There seemed to be an unforeseen electrical quality in the air; she had felt it even when she first came in, but every lightest speech was oddly charged with it, you couldn't tell what was coming. Instead of vindicating her confidence in Mrs. Lalor, the latter seemed bent on a self destruction that might drag any one else down with her. She went on now happily.

"Of course, though I always cared most for Bennie—he was such a beautiful waltzer. Sometimes even now, after breakfast, if I'm a little blue, he says, 'Come, George, let's have

a waltz,' and he just spins me around the room while he whistles the tune. I don't think there's anything like dancing for keeping up the spirits. I don't know what I'd do without Bennie up No'th here, he's so thoughtful of me!"

"How extraordinary!" breathed little Mrs. Spicer to Mrs. Stone, athwart the rapt gaze of the silent Mrs. Frere. It was evident that neither Mr. Stone nor Mr. Spicer felt appalled, both men seemed to be impalpably walled off from the jurisdiction of their wives, as they sat smiling with interested indulgence at their hostess, with young Mr. Frere, open-mouthed, behind them.

In spite of the semi-artificiality of her aspect, Mrs. Lalor had an undoubted charm; her face looked younger and less drawn by lamplight, and her pretty, tear-soft eyes had their coquettish gleam in them, her careless attitude was full of lazy grace. She thrust out a slippered foot with its hanging length of ribbon, and gave an appealing glance at the man nearest her.

"I know you want to tie my shoe for me, Mr. Stone—no, Mr. Spicer, I didn't say you."

She laughed gleefully as they both jumped for position, Mr. Stone's large bulk going down heavily on one knee with exaggerated gallantry.

"Let me fan you while he's doing it," cried Mr. Spicer eagerly, seizing the required implement from the table.

"You'd better fan Mrs. Stone, she looks so warm," suggested Mrs. Lalor. "The house is so heated, it makes one's face burn after the cold air. Wouldn't you like a little powder to cool it?" She jumped up hospitably, leaving Mr. Stone still upon the floor. "It isn't the slightest trouble to get it, I always keep it in this little cupboard, with a puff and a handglass—and some rouge," she explained in a confidential tone. "Not that I care for rouge myself, Bennie doesn't like it, but some people always use it for the evenin'."

Mrs. Stone gasped.

"Thank you, I need nothing of the kind," she said hastily. She, the mother of four, a member of the Guild and the Vittoria Colonna Club to be spoken to in connection with *rouge!* Even Mrs. Laurence's white chin went up—this did seem "common."

"And I really think we'll have to be going," added Mrs. Stone with decision, rising as she spoke, a signal imitated by Mrs. Spicer, though Mrs. Frere sat fast.

"Oh, do wait for us," pleaded Mrs. Laurence eagerly. "Here is my husband now. You're ready to go now, aren't you, Will?"

"Yes, as soon as I wrap up those docu-

ments," he assented, with an unconscious exhilaration of tone that caught her ear. He disappeared into the opposite room once more. Mr. Lalor had just walked out of it, and down the length of the bare hall, with echoing steps.

"Oh, you *must* stay and have some more hot lemonade," Mrs. Lalor begged warmly, and stopped suddenly short; a faint colour came into her cheek; it was as if she listened, not to the chorus, "No, not to-night——" "Thank you just the same——" "We really must go——" but to something impalpable, unguessed.

"Excuse me for just one moment," she said and vanished swiftly into the narrow passage, leaving behind her a surprised, disapproving silence—even Mrs. Frere stood up; there was a queer, unexpected sensation that something was happening. Mrs. Laurence went out nervously to get her cloak. In that oblique glimpse down the hall to the dining-room she saw—or didn't she really see anything?—a man's arm stretched wildly out as if to reach something—a woman's hand grasping it—the wavering shadow as of a struggle—and the faintest sound as of a key turning as it might be in a sideboard lock. Something must be happening——! Though only, indeed, one unimportant scene of a

tragedy such as these happy, protected women had no knowledge of, that long, exquisitely heart-racking, unmentionable strain of living that companies the degradation of one who is loved.

"Did your coal come to-day, Mrs. Laurence?" asked Mrs. Stone in a chill, unnatural voice. They were all getting on their wraps now.

"No, it didn't," answered Mrs. Laurence. Justice compelled her to add, with an effort: "It wasn't Harner's fault, after all. Will forgot to order it on his way to the station; he felt so badly about it, but he's had so much business on his mind lately that I really think I mustn't ask him to do anything more."

"You're more lenient than my wife would have been," said Mr. Stone jovially. "I'd have gotten it in the neck."

"You'd have deserved it," agreed Mr. Spicer.

"I feel dreadfully because you're all going so soon," said Mrs. Lalor appearing once more, clinging with both little hands to the arm of her husband, who, sullen and dejected, towered above her. She looked wan and thin, as if some ageing mist had settled over her, but the wrinkles that had deepened around her pretty eyes did not keep them

from being indomitably flirtatious as she glanced back to the man who had followed them in.

"Mr. Laurence and I haven't had a chance to tell any secrets *at all!*—What did you say, Mrs. Spicer? Yes, the house *is* warm, thanks to Mr. Laurence," she assented gayly. "He insisted on orderin' my coal for me this mornin'."

There was a dead silence. To her dying day Mrs. Laurence could see that whole scene definitely before her—the embarrassed attitudes of the men; the arrested, guilty expression on her husband's face that all might read; Mrs. Frere's greedy joy; the compassionate gaze of Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Spicer after their swift flash of comprehension.—Yet after that one paralyzing moment she rose staunchly superior to the petty, yet excruciating entanglement of the situation. She stepped forward and kissed Mrs. Lalor good-bye in the face of her little world, with a hand-pressure that emphasized the words:

"I'm so glad Mr. Laurence could be of service to you," before she made her exit with him. Yet there were those who felt that they were not deceived and the eyes of Mr. Stone and Mr. Spicer met as the door closed behind the husband and wife—and it

was a glance that confided a sinister and mutual thankfulness of escape.

The two in question walked swiftly away in silence on the starlit, drift-bordered path; the wind had gone down but it was infinitely cold. They went, part of the time, in single file, but she ignored his tentative pressure on her arm; there seemed to be an icy chasm between them. The distance to the house was short, and it was not until they were inside it that she broke forth hotly, as if they had been talking together all the way, her crimson cheeks and blazing eyes facing his tall, reluctant figure as she threw off her wraps.

"It wasn't as if I could *ever* say anything to those people to explain! Oh, it's so perfectly horrid, so *maddening*, so utterly ridiculous on the face of it!—They'll think I'm jealous of her—they'll be sorry for me. *Sorry!* As if I could possibly be jealous of *her*. They'll think you keep everything from me, and that they know more about you than I do. How could you have put me in such a position when just a word ——" She made a little sound that was half a moan. "Why you didn't have the decency to tell me before we went there I *can't* see." Her voice rose higher. "Yes I can—you were afraid; afraid of your wife! It does seem pretty

bad to have you remember to do things for other people, when you can't remember them for me, but that isn't the point I mind most, it's not the real thing—what I *can't* stand is you not having the courage to own up, to tell me the truth. Why don't you say something?"

"Because you're saying it all."

"O Will!" She gazed at him hopelessly as he stood in front of her, her hand laid detainingly on his arm. He looked very high-bred, very much a gentleman, with that air of aloof *hauteur;* there were circles under his dark eyes, and his lips had a compression that she well knew. If there was anything that Mr. Laurence hated temperamentally it was a shrewish woman; the ice of the winter's night couldn't freeze harder than he when she stormed, even though he allowed that she had righteous reason for her wrath. He spoke now, in answer to her appeal, with stiff, prideful humility:

"You know very well that I'm extremely sorry about the whole matter. As for ordering that coal for Mrs. Lalor, I meant to have told you about it when we got back, you know I never can keep anything from you; I don't *want* to. I forgot it when I first came home—and then you took me by surprise, someway. And now don't you think

we've perhaps had enough of this? *I'm* tired."

"No, no; don't go yet!" Mrs. Laurence's hand pinioned him fast. She had known all along that she would forgive him when she had spoken her mind—what else can one do but forgive when one loves? Oh, that was but a little part of it—the forgiveness! The real need all the time was that he should be reinstated on the pedestal from which his own act had driven him. He must be, not the Will whom she forgave, but the Will whom she adored. Her certainty dropped from her; she began reasonably, to grow more and more tremulously beseeching.

"Will, *please* listen! I can't bear it when you look at me as if you didn't like me. Of course, I knew all the time that you were sorry—I knew you meant to tell me the truth! *Of course*, you can't always think of it at the moment when I take you by surprise and fly at you and scold you—nobody could! I don't wonder that you hate to tell me things, when I make it so hard for you. I ought to be a hundred times nicer than I am. When I saw *her* husband standing there to-night you looked so fine and beautiful and good—and *truthful*"—a sob, not tears, but just a sob broke athwart the words—"I

thank God every day on my *knees* that I'm married to you!"

Her arms dropped from their hold, but his were around her now, pressing her closer, and still closer; the eyes he bent upon the upturned face were smiling, yet a little moist, too—his tender voice had in it every admission that she longed for as he whispered:

"Oh, Nan—foolish, foolish Nan! Such a *sweet* woman——!"

The Triumph of Father

The Triumph of Father

"WELL, what do you want me to do to-day, Min? Speak up quick." Mr. Harlow, in his holiday morning costume, consisting of a pair of old and baggy trousers, an outing shirt and an utterly incongruous coat, with bulging pockets, stood by the piazza steps, a disreputable grey felt hat held in one hand.

"It's nearly ten o'clock, and I must go down-town and get some nails before the stores close for the day. I had expected to send one of the boys, but Betty tells me that Herbert has gone to play in the golf tournament, and Jack is off to the ball game. If there's anything round the house you want mended, now's your time to tell me."

"We want a screw for the wringer—or perhaps it's a nut," said Mrs. Harlow, hazily, her eyes fixed on her husband. "The top is off the piano-stool again, and there is the arm of the red chair,—you'll find it in the closet under the stairs,—and one of the faucets in the kitchen sink will keep running. Oh, yes, and there's a caster broken off the refrigerator, too; we have to prop it up with

a block of wood, but it's so crooked that the water from it goes all over the cellar floor. Please don't forget it, will you? But, David, you are not going down to the village looking like that? It's really disgraceful! If any one should see you! It won't take you a minute to go up-stairs and change your coat and put on another necktie."

"What's the matter with the clothes I have on?" Mr. Harlow looked down at himself with satisfaction. "Just the things to work in, good and easy. I'll go on now, and you can think what else you want done, and tell me when I come back." He stopped to take the letters from the grey-clad postman, who had just come up with the one mail of a holiday. "Here's one for me from Tom. I'll read it as I go along. Good-bye!"

Mr. Harlow, who had put on his hat, took it off in courtesy to his wife, as he looked back and smiled a last affectionate farewell to her from the other side of the gate. Her eyes watched his large form, with its firm stride, until it disappeared round the corner. She loved his little politenesses of manner to her.

The wind touched the purple clusters of wistaria above her head, and shook out a sweet perfume from them. The grass around the house was close cut and velvety, but

next door the lawn-mower was click-clicking busily, and the sky was as blue as a summer sky.

Mrs. Harlow, slender and trim in a freshly washed lilac cambric gown that matched the wistaria, sat on the piazza opening her letters with the true holiday feeling of the suburbanite.

Nothing whatever of interest presented itself for her amusement, but the mere fact that her husband was at home for the day seemed to breathe a pleasant sense of confusion and excitement that disqualified her for any connected occupation, in spite of the big pile of sewing up-stairs.

"Any letters, mother?"

Betty, the daughter of the house, who had come out in a white shirt-waist and a straw hat decked with last year's blue corn-flowers, perched herself on the end of the piazza. "I'm going to the train to meet Sylvia, but it isn't time yet. I'm so glad she'll be here! I haven't seen her for weeks."

"There's a letter from your Aunt Kitty," said the mother. "She says your Uncle Tom is going to retire from business. They want to take Lutie abroad for change of air. She must be nearly eight years old now. She's been so well lately they're afraid of a reaction. I can't quite make out where they're going

first; it looks like Himalaya. Oh, I see! It's Edinburgh."

"It might as well be Himalaya. Lutie's never had anything but changes of air since she was born," said Betty, crossly. "How some people do travel! They seem to have money for everything, while we—well, things can't go on like this much longer! I'm going to work and earn something just as soon as I can now. And Jack says he wants to leave school and go in an office like Herbert. It's too bad to leave so much on father. Don't you think he has had more on his mind lately?"

"I'm afraid he has," said Mrs. Harlow, with a sigh. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, something so horrid happened yesterday! I meant to keep it to myself, but I can't." Betty's cheeks were red, her eyes were flashing. "I was at Mrs. Kennedy's, with those books, and she asked if there was anything the matter with father, he had been looking so worn lately. She thought outsiders always noticed those things more quickly than the family."

"The idea!" said Mrs. Harlow, indignantly.

"Then when I was in the hall I heard them talking; I couldn't help it. They said—she and Mrs. Bradley—what a pity it was when a

man didn't get on well in business, and Mrs. Tower said she was always so sorry for the wife of an unsuccessful man; it must be so dreadful, if you had any ambition, to see your husband a failure. She said she never could really respect a man who showed himself deficient. I was so angry I could hardly walk home. I went up-stairs and cried. I wanted to burst right in and tell them how nobly father had behaved when that old Johnson absconded, and how he was trying to pay up all the back debts. But I knew it wasn't any use ——"

"Deficient!" Mrs. Harlow's eyes glittered. "Your father's brain—well, your father's brain is far beyond most people's. How he can make all those calculations the way he does ——" She paused. Her own education dated back of the modern era. She was sound on the arithmetic of her butcher's and grocer's books, but beyond that all figures looked to her much like a drop of water seen through a microscope.

"There's the whistle!" said Betty, suddenly jumping up and making for the train to meet her best friend.

The subject of this conversation had meanwhile been wending his way to the town. He perhaps had looked forward to a time of pecuniary ease and leisure, when, instead of

tinkering round the house, he might play golf. But no one, not even his wife, quite understood what a holiday meant to Mr. Harlow.

To escape for a solid block of sunlit secular hours out of the grimy, artificially lighted, badly ventilated office, with its white, tired-looking clerks, and its association of intricate, harassing toil—to escape from this to the peacefulness of green grass, and the click of the lawn-mower, and the flickering of shade from the new leaves of the elms that arched the street, and the sweet voices of little children calling to one another, was to go back into a little corner of the emerald fields of boyhood.

Mr. Harlow was not in the least old; he was indeed barely middle-aged; yet there were moments when he knew that he was not so young as he had been. On the spring morning of a holiday the thought, even if it came, was robbed of its shadow.

His face had the kind smile that children always trusted, as he stopped to pick up a tiny, curly-haired girl who had fallen in his way. The action showed him the letter, which he had forgotten, still in his hand.

He opened and read it as he walked, stopped short and read it again with knitted brows. Then he walked on and on, as one deep in thought, until he came to the other

side of the village. He did not go near the stores, but strolled instead towards a large, unoccupied house that stood surrounded by lawns and trees, well apart from its neighbours. There was a clear view of the hills from the porch. Mr. Harlow walked round the house and through the garden, and sat on the porch steps, still deep in thought.

"I did not know what had become of you," said his wife, running down the walk to meet him as he once more came in through the gate. "Why, it's after twelve o'clock! I was afraid something had happened to you! I suppose you've been talking all this time to somebody." She did not give him an opportunity to answer, but drew him up beside her to one of the piazza chairs. "I know you won't have time to mend all those things I asked you to, without taking up all your afternoon, and I don't want you to do that. But I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to fix the leg of the refrigerator."

"It would be better to buy a new one, wouldn't it?" asked Mr. Harlow, impartially.

"'Better to buy a new one!' I only wish I could. How queer you act, David! Aren't you going to put the netting on the screens now? I think you'll have time before dinner; it's to be at one o'clock to-day."

"I can't do the screens now, Min. The

store was shut when I went to buy the nails. Who's that talking to Betty?"

"It's Sylvia; she has come out for a couple of days. And, O David, a telegram came for Betty while you were gone, from Harry Leroy. He'll be on to-night, and he's not going back to Indiana any more. He has a position here with his cousin."

"Hum!" Mr. Harlow looked doubtfully considerate. "How old is Betty? Fifteen?"

"She will be nineteen in September."

"Oh, well, she's nothing but a child yet," said Mr. Harlow, in a tone that defied denial.

"Nothing but a child," assented his wife, cheerfully.

There was a pause. "How old were you when we were married, Min?"

"Twenty. It was entirely too young."

"I remember," Mr. Harlow's voice was reflective, "my mother told me she was married at seventeen and my grandmother was married at fifteen; and I had an aunt who——"

"If you remember any more I'll go in the house!" said his wife, indignantly. "What is the matter with you, David? Where have you been this morning?"

"Well, Min, I've something to tell you. I——" he stopped, his voice altered and his

eyes became suddenly alert. "Hello! What's that over there?"

"Smoke, isn't it?" she answered, her gaze following his towards the horizon. "It seems to me I can smell it."

"Looks like a fire, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but I don't hear any fire-bells."

Mr. Harlow rose. "Two-thirds of our beloved volunteer fire department are off on a picnic or a procession or something to-day. I'm going over to that smoke on the old bicycle, and find out what's the matter."

"You'd a great deal better stay at home!" his wife called after him, but he was gone.

She still sat on the piazza. A few moments later a rider sped past, and then another. Then the fire-bells began to ring at last—clang! clang! clang, clang, clang!

The fire was on the outskirts of the village, in a different direction from that which Mr. Harlow had taken in the morning. The smoke rose a blacker and blacker column in the distance, interspersed with sudden bursts of flame. The crackling sound of burning wood, the occasional sound of something falling, and hoarse voices calling to one another were borne faintly yet unmistakably upon the air.

"I'm going to the fire!" It was Betty, hat in hand, who had rushed down-stairs

breathless. "Come on, Syl! Oh, isn't it exciting! Just look at that blaze! There go our boys!"

The street was filled with an outpouring of bicycles with their riders, and with boys and men coming in from the various games, Herbert in one set, Jack in another. The village was rapidly becoming deserted. Mrs. Harlow began to wish she might go, too, but she guaged the distance and forbore.

The fire had started in some outhouses, and helped by a sudden breeze, had leaped merrily over intervening space towards a large barn that stretched out red and imposing over one end of the field. Beyond that was a dwelling-house. The barn, which was new, while piled at one end with fodder, was as yet untenanted by any animals, as Mr. Harlow thankfully discovered on reaching the place.

The stir in the village had not extended to these outlying fields, which were all deserted, as became a holiday. A woman stood in the doorway of the house, watching the blaze. One man was running off, shouting for help, and another was carrying two buckets of water towards the barn.

He came up to Mr. Harlow and put the buckets on the ground.

'There ain't any use in carryin' water," he

said, "not a mite o' use, only it seemed sort o' natural to do it. Just look at those flames!"

"The engine ought to hurry up if it's going to do any good," said Mr. Harlow.

"Can't do a particle of good if it does come. There ain't any water here—that is, not more than a teacupful; well and cistern's dry as a bone."

"The house will not catch," said Mr. Harlow; "the wind is the other way. You are sure there was no one in the barn?"

"Sure," said the man.

They were gazing at the flames, which enveloped one end of the structure. Another moment, and there was a deafening crash through the roar of the fire; half of the barn had fallen in, and revealed beyond, high up on one of the big beams of the rafters, the white faces and crouching forms of six little children, huddled close together. Playing in the loft, they had climbed higher and higher back, to get out of reach of the flames.

A cry of horror broke from the two onlookers. The next instant the man, wildly shrieking for help, followed Mr. Harlow, who sped towards the barn.

The flames that had left one part of the building still untouched were rapidly curling round it, lighting up the faces of the children.

The roof sloped with a sharp pitch, but there were a couple of projecting ledges below it.

Mr. Harlow had been an athlete in his day. In spite of his large, heavily built frame, he was still quick of motion, sure of foot, keen of eye. He took off his coat and threw it on the ground, and then in some way he was climbing up the barn.

He disappeared, then reappeared again inside. Swinging himself up on a blackened rafter, he held with one hand to a support above, and with the other lifted one half-insensible child from her perch, and swung her over into the waiting grasp of a fireman below, for the engine had come up, and the field was black with the whole swarming village population, gathering larger and larger forces each minute.

Six times did Mr. Harlow's strong arm plunge forward and encircle a helpless, drooping little form in the sight of the field of breathless spectators.

As the last one was safely handed over, a sharp breath of relief came from the crowd. Then there was a leaping flame, and a cloud of smoke surged up and hid him from view.

"The doctor says he'll be all right soon. Really, mother, we're not keeping anything from you.'

Betty, with high-keyed voice, flaming cheeks and wild eyes, was under the impression that she was pacifically calm of demeanour. She had been taken home in a friend's buggy.

"There's not the least cause for worry. He's only suffocated a little, you know, from the smoke, and of course his hands are burned a little, and his feet; and he's not quite conscious yet, but he's all right. I was to tell you that particularly, but you're always so nervous! They'll have him home here soon. Herbert's with him, and Syl is bringing his coat. And—O mother!"

Betty fell into Mrs. Harlow's arms, and they wept together.

"It was the most glorious thing you ever saw!" said the daughter, brokenly. "Syl and I reached the field just after Herbert and Jack, and we heard some one saying, 'Yes, six children in there, but there's a man trying to get them out.'

"And then we saw a figure in the barn, through the smoke, and Herbert cried, 'It's father! it's father!' and ran forward, and Jack and I just screamed, 'It's father! Oh, it's father!' And oh, you ought to have heard everybody, mother,—I'll never forget it,—and Jack cheered, but I could only cry, 'It's father!' And then there was a sort of

a crash, and then lots of people came up and told us he'd be all right soon, and Mr. Nevin put me in his buggy and brought me home. But if you'd seen how surprised everybody was to find it was father! What's the matter with you, mother?"

"Oh, nothing," said the mother. She had drawn her form from her daughter's embrace and was standing erect. "It doesn't surprise me in the least. I always knew how brave your father was. Why, when we were engaged he saved a man from—O Betty, Betty, here they come!"

It was a cavalcade led by Jack, with outriders on bicycles and followers on foot, surrounding an ancient barouche, on one seat of which Mr. Harlow was solicitously propped up by his son Herbert, his white face, grotesque with scorched hair, smiling quizzical encouragement at his wife.

"I'm all right," he said, in response to her faltering, "O David!" "Such nonsense! I don't know what all this fuss is about."

"We know, Mrs. Harlow," said the doctor, as he helped his charge out of the carriage and up-stairs, still protesting, with bandages on his hands and feet. He professed himself as fit as a fighting cock to the wife who sat by his side and gazed at him, while Betty and Herbert received visitors and reporters below

with the condescension of those of the blood to the lesser nobility.

"Yes, it's the third time." Betty's voice had become attuned to the recital as the afternoon wore on towards dusk. "Once he rescued a man from the rapids in the St. Lawrence River—my uncle said it was one of the most daring deeds he ever witnessed; and another time he stopped a runaway horse, and saved two women from being dashed against a stone wall. And another time, when he was quite a boy, he had a fight with two burglars in the dark, and forced them—— What is it Herbert wants, Syl? I'll go up-stairs and see. Will you just take this jelly that Mrs. Scovel brought over, and put it where Jack can't get at it?

"Mother!" She opened the door of the 'throne-room," where the invalid, propped, up among his pillows, with a napkin under his chin, had the air of an enormous infant as his wife fed him with beef tea.

"Mother, there's another reporter down-stairs. Herbert says he wants one of father's pictures. There's the telegraph boy riding up—it's the sixth message we've had. Jack, bring it to me here! I'll open it. It says, 'Just heard the news. Love and congratulations for our hero.' It's from Aunt Kitty. Herbert wired her at once."

"It's the most fool business I ever heard of," said the man in the bed, helplessly. "If I'd done anything, I wouldn't mind, but——"

"Yes, dear, don't excite yourself," said his wife, in soothing tone. "Betty——" She gave her daughter a warning glance.

"I hope we're through with all this tommy rot," said Mr. Harlow, as Betty's footsteps retreated.

He did not hear her voice again going on fluently to a fresh batch of visitors: "Once he rescued a man on the St. Lawrence River from a stone wall—I mean the rapids, one of the most daring deeds——"

"Min!"

"Yes, David."

"Get my coat. Who's that at the door now?"

It was Herbert's voice this time. "What year was father born in?"

"Great Scott!" moaned the invalid. "Go down and tell 'em you don't know. Shut that door! Get my coat, Min, and in the inner left-hand side pocket—don't hold it upside down; you'll let all my keys fall out; there, I told you so—some of that change rolled under the bed—never mind, look for it later. The left-hand pocket, I said——" Twenty-one years of matrimony had not

availed to teach Mrs. Harlow the intricacy of her husband's pockets. "Not that one; there, now you've hit it! Take that letter out."

"Why, it's the one you got from Tom this morning!"

"Yes; open it, and read for yourself. Tell me how it strikes you."

As Mrs. Harlow read, the colour rose in her face. "Tom wishes to retire from active business—yes, that's what Kitty's letter said. I should think he'd have to, when—O David, he says if you'll take his place in the firm—he has long been thinking of such an arrangement—David!"

"Ah, don't take my hand, dear!" He winced instinctively, but his tone was very gentle. "Foolish woman, stop kissing those bandages."

"O David, now your worries will all be over at last! The children had been planning how they could help you. I wonder what it will seem like to be able to buy anything new once more. And perhaps we could take the Morris house!"

"That's just what I had been thinking of. I was over there prowling round the place this morning. I thought we'd go down and look at it again together after dinner. And I'm glad for your sake, Min, that I'm not such a

failure as it seemed, after all, dear. You won't have to be ashamed of your husband. What's that noise?"

There was the roll of drums and the sound of flying footsteps, mingled with Betty's hysterical tones:

"O mother! O mother! Look out of the window! The procession is stopping outside!"

Like the Lady of Shalott, Mrs. Harlow made three paces through the room to look beyond her threshold. Before her dazed vision rose ranks and ranks of men, crowding the street before her doorway, with the flag in front.

Some one was waving the flag, and Herbert was speaking, and then there was a cheer, and another, and another, and yet another; but she was not standing by the window; her face was down by her husband's.

"Oh," she breathed, with a loving scorn in her choking voice, as she touched the bandaged hand that tried to seek hers, "I don't need to have you climb up burning barns and rescue children, I don't need to have you 'successful,' as they call it, to know who you are! If every one despised you, if you were so poor you had to—dig—wells, I'd still know you were the dearest, the bravest, the best, the most wonderful man in all the world! I'm just too proud of you to live!"

The Portion of the Youngest

The Portion of the Youngest

"BIG weddings are horrid. I think it's a great deal nicer to elope—my grandmother eloped, and she was only sixteen at the time, nearly two years younger than I."

"That is a very foolish way to talk, Tina; times are quite different, now."

"I don't see why! Anyway, I hate weddings. I only care for dances. Momsey, aren't you going to let me go to this dance? What difference does it make if I'm *not* out? All my friends are to be there—the Clarks, and Edith Bayne and Francis Fanshawe. Daddy said I could go before he went away, and I've been counting on it all the time, and now you won't let me!"

Tina sat on an ottoman in the centre of the big, mahogany-furnished, old-fashioned room, with her light hair falling over one ear and her large, clear, blue eyes fixed tragically on the face of the parent who sat busily sewing. Tina's slim shoulders were hunched forward and her feet crossed in the attitude which always brought forth her mother's rebuke:

"Don't sit that way, dear; it's very unlady-

like. How often have I told you, Tina, that if you get in the habit of sitting like that when we're alone you'll do it when you don't realize it."

Mrs. Malison's voice had the tone of a well-worn persistency. She was a young-looking woman for her years, and still handsome enough to make the resemblance to her youngest daughter very apparent, even to the obstinate little curve of the short upper lip. The answer was almost as automatic:

"I wouldn't *care!* Momsey, why won't you let me go to the dance?"

"Now, Tina, what is the use of teasing mother any more about that?" said the second daughter, coming into the room. Elinor was small and dark, with finely marked eyebrows, regular features, and an expression of great intelligence, wrecked at times by a shattering wave of nervousness. At the moment she carried in her hand a bird's bath-tub, filled with water, destined for the cage over by the window, where a brown and dishevelled canary hung mopingly from a perch. She went on:

"You know perfectly well that mother thinks you've been staying up a great deal too late in the evening. You cannot study and go out at the same time. And she told you she didn't approve of your being so much

with Francis Fanshawe—none of us do. He may be a nice enough boy, but he isn't our kind. We all of us think you'd better let the acquaintance drop."

"Oh, if you don't want me to do *anything!*" Tina's eyes began to sparkle ominously. "It doesn't make the slightest difference to me when you talk that way about my friends. I like them, no matter what you and Annette say. You've always been down on Francis! And I don't care whether I keep on with my studies or not."

"Tina!" Elinor carefully inserted the bathtub in the cage before flinging herself volubly upon the subject. "Tina, you can't mean that—you want to be educated, I hope! Besides, you'll enjoy coming out into society a great deal more later, and if you're seen everywhere now, people will be taking you for much older than you are."

"I wouldn't care!" Tina's defiant tone took on an increasing rapidity. "I don't see what good it does to be educated, anyway. People like you just as well when you're silly. I think it's dreadfully stupid to go to college the way you did and get so critical, and never see any fun in things, and analyze everybody the way you do Robert Harper, so that you never know whether you like him or not. I wish you'd take enough interest in him to

get him to shave off that horrid, little, black mustache—it makes him look so sleek! I don't care for what they teach in books. It doesn't do me any good to learn about the ancient Egyptians and the battles of the Civil War, and write Enoch Arden over upside down; I hate Enoch Arden, he makes me so *cross*—— I care for automobiles, and skating and having a good time with my friends, and *dancing*. And it's no use telling me I'll enjoy myself more later. I want to enjoy myself now! Maybe there won't *be* any 'later'; maybe I'll be dead."

"I wonder how you make a bird take a bath," said Elinor in an absorbed tone. She regarded the canary with a baffled eye. "I've had the water warm and I've had it cold; I've put the tub in every position I can think of, and left it there for half a day at a time, and he only hops around and looks at it." Her voice rose in sudden, nervous excitement. "I don't know *what* to do. He hasn't taken a bath in a week. He *must* take a bath!"

"You get in and show him how," jibed Tina, with a delighted childish giggle. She jumped up from the ottoman, swooping her arms down to embrace the mother, who still sat sewing. "All right, momsey, I'm to go to the dance; it's all settled. Let me try

Tweetums, Elinor!" she ran over to the cage, brushing her sister to one side. Tina seemed to take the light with her when she moved; it clung around her bright hair, and radiated from her fair skin and her clear eyes, and even lurked, shimmering, in the folds of her sky-blue gown. She stood with upraised head touching the gilded wires of the cage, talking in tender, caressing sound to the little feathered rebel, with a lure of sugar crumbs upon her red lips, until he came to peck at them. What made the transition—what magic was hers? There was a sudden splash, a shower of raindrops over her laughing, triumphant face as she started back, before she ran from the room. Tina had the winning way.

"I thought I heard Tina in here," said a taller sister, entering by another door. Annette was perhaps not so pretty as the other two, but she had a large, blonde gentleness, very reposefully attractive. She had been engaged for four years to a charming fellow, whose only lack was that of money, consequent on a dependent mother and sisters. The lovers had preserved the spirit of romance by varying the manifestations of it—for the last twelvemonth spending their time with note-book and pencil, raptly ciphering out the future possibilities of a livelihood for

two on the narrowest known limit. Although Annette and Joseph had seen each other nearly every evening during this probation her soft eyes suffused and her soft cheeks rosed as virginally on the thousandth time he appeared as on the first.

She held up a garment now as she spoke. "I want to give this new waist to Tina to mend. Just see where she's torn it! I found it under her desk."

"Now, Annette, if you've been putting her room to rights again——!" Elinor held up her hands in despair.

"I couldn't stand seeing it the way it was," said Annette apologetically.

"Yes, of course, that's the way you spoil her. I'm sure you and I were brought up very differently. Here, give me a needle and thread, she'll never mend that waist. Mother, now you've let Tina think she's going to the dance, that settles it; you can't go back on it now: but I think she ought to understand that *this* is absolutely the last time."

"She seemed to take it so to heart," said the mother weakly. She tried to rally herself intelligently. "Of course I don't mind her accepting invitations occasionally; she's nearly eighteen; but the girls who are not out have more going on than the girls that

are. And that young Fanshawe—he seems a stupid sort of a boy, to me; but he does such reckless things I do *not* like to have Tina with him."

"Oh, mother, he's all right, really, he's only young." Annette's tone was gently protesting. "He's so much richer than the others that he can do more things—that's all; she'll soon get tired of him. All the boys in that set are devoted to Tina. When a girl is as pretty as she is ——" The three looked at each other in the pause that followed, but each saw only the image of the beloved youngest.

Tina, indeed, was in that stage of rebellion at life in which she could see no meaning in any law of her elders; her young desire controverted all their worldly experience. What was the use of saying she couldn't want to do things when she patently did? Refusal hardened her; reason was only that which darkeneth understanding. She resented any appeal to her affection, not because she had little, but because she had so much that she fought being mastered by it, and thrown into those hated fits of weeping and contrition. She stormily wanted what she wanted. Yet if she were left untrammelled she showed unexpected glimpses of a heart passionately loving and tender; an undercurrent as old as

the world, as deep as life, profoundly affecting. Tina was the only one of the family who had "temperament," a fact dimly perceived only in the desire to shield the child from something unknown. At present there was the uneasy feeling that this something might be a youthful attachment for Francis Fanshawe.

To the critical eye, young Fanshawe, an orphan, was simply a stolid and uninteresting young fellow of twenty-one, tall, heavily built, and reddish in hair and complexion. Elinor characterized him as "thuddy," a word coined by the family to indicate the quality of weight. He had no expression, and was tongue-tied in the presence of his elders, even the sympathetic Annette failing to elicit response from him, though with the youth of his own "set" Francis seemed to be voluble enough in the loud exchange of catch phrases and slangy interjections which made their happy intercourse, and he and Tina could talk by the hour together in a murmuring undertone. He was rather dangerously well off in a community where only the fathers had money, a fact in itself calculated to affect his reputation. But his light-blue eyes could look squarely into yours, and he had a good grip of the hand. He was undoubtedly a nice enough boy if

you liked that kind, though Elinor could only wonder that anybody did. She herself only liked people who interested and stimulated.

With Elinor a lover was a creature to be analyzed mercilessly under the suspicion that otherwise he might get some power over one by sheer force of his affection; he was pictured in all sorts of impossible situations to test his attraction, every barrier was erected that ingenuity could devise. The way Elinor "treated" Robert was one of the stock subjects of interest and reprehension in the family, though Robert, intelligent, darkly good-looking and ineffective, was simply pleased if she was pleasant, and patiently snubbed when she wasn't. Annette and Joseph—that patently good fellow who had had the courage of his convictions four years ago—enjoyed their little confidences of amused laughter over the situation. Still, precedent had made an engagement of marriage something to be very thoughtfully entered into, or necessarily prolonged. When it came to Tina ——

Mrs. Malison wrote to her husband, as he did to her, every night during his long absences from home. She reposed so thoroughly in theory on his judgment that neither of them realized that in practice she decided everything. Her resolution to restrict the

girl's gaieties was suddenly hardened by the events of the dance, though it was twenty-four hours before she got a chance to express it, Tina having slept until the late afternoon in defiance of her pledge to study, and visitors taking up the rest of the day. One visitor, indeed, was partly responsible for the mother's steadily increasing purpose; kind, elderly, little Miss Ward in her neat black jacket, trimmed with a mysterious ginger-coloured fur, being one of those amiable conversationalists who scatter the seeds of discomfort wherever they tread. Mrs. Malison, although she knew from aforetime what she had to expect, couldn't help the usual thrill of exasperation at the opening sentence:

"How fleshy you are growing! I said the other day as you were passing, 'I hardly knew Mrs. Malison, she's getting so stout; it's easy to see that she doesn't let things worry *her!*' Your husband looked very badly, I think, when he was here last. I want to apologize for not coming before to congratulate Miss Elinor on her engagement to Mr. Harper."

"My dear Miss Ward, you have been misinformed"—Mrs. Malison felt that she was holding herself well in hand—"Elinor would be very much obliged to you, I'm sure—but there is no engagement."

"Well, now, isn't that singular!" Miss Ward's small features indicated a deep and wondering interest. "I certainly understood from Mrs. Painter that Ethel said it was announced; I know she mentioned that every one was talking of it. I was there yesterday looking at the things Mrs. Painter brought over from the other side—beautiful, aren't they? She gave me a lovely little framed photograph from some place in Italy—Sorrento, I think; you can get them here for a quarter, but of course it's the *thought* you value. She showed me the most exquisite laces—and hats——! Six of them; perfect dreams. How pretty *your* hat looks this year; you've had such good wear out of it, too, haven't you? I'm sure *I* never mind if a thing isn't in the newest style! Oh, by the way, my sister was one of the chaperons with you last night at the young people's dance. She said Miss Tina evidently enjoyed herself if one could judge by her actions—quite a case, isn't she! And so noticeable-looking, too. Of course, when she gets as old as your other daughters she'll sober down; I'm sure, as I told my sister, you never see them doing anything conspicuous."

Conspicuous! The word of all others calculated to bring the blood to a mother's cheek. Mrs. Malison trembled almost visi-

bly with her effort at self-control, as she switched the conversation further afield, though she saw as plainly as on the night before the lighted ballroom and the tall, lissome, white-clad figure of Tina, with gleaming golden hair and scintillating eyes, "holding hands" with Francis Fanshawe in ring-around-a-rosy fashion, now high above her head, now swinging low down, as the two went flying across the floor, not once, but many times, with an exaggerated, heel-and-toe, boy-and-girl sportiveness after every one else was seated and the music had grown as freakishly mad as they. Mrs. Malison had not realized at first that it was Tina. Then, after that whispered rebuke they had disappeared until it was nearly time to go home, emerging finally, on being sent for, from a palm-hidden corner of the enclosed balcony, Tina with very flushed cheeks, hazy eyes and a general air of having been Called Back, too plain to be mistaken—a perfectly open, childlike defiance of inevitable comment that made one moan in ludicrous dismay. There is nothing so patently open to criticism as innocence. Even through the "thuddiness" of Francis there showed the glitter of an eye which told of the spirit within. Mrs. Malison's annoyance had culminated when she spoke to Tina on the second morning. She

was fully nerved for struggle. This thing had to stop.

"Tina, I have been waiting for an opportunity to speak to you about the ball. I was very much displeased with your behaviour; *very* much displeased! I felt obliged to write to your father about it. I cannot allow you to go to another dance this winter."

"All right; I don't want to," said Tina uninterestedly.

She had thrown herself down on the wicker lounge beside a black poodle stretched out on the Roman-striped coverlet, and putting her arms around the animal surveyed her mother from this position. Mrs. Malison's eyes feasted on the picture.

"Tina, you are entirely too young to do as you please. You know nothing about the consequences. After this you are to attend to your studies. I don't wish you to be seen with Francis Fanshawe any more; and I don't wish you to invite him here."

"He's not coming," said Tina briefly. "Momsey, I want a new grey suit! I know I had this green one last month, but I hate it. All my friends are getting grey suits now."

"Tina, have you quarrelled with Francis?"

"No."

Mrs. Malison looked uncomfortably puzzled.

"Then—— Has he done anything you don't like, dear?"

"No."

"There isn't anything that you're keeping from me?" In spite of denial, Mrs. Malison felt the tenacity of some purpose that she could not fathom.

"No; oh, *no!*" Tina raised her voice at the sight of her two sisters in the doorway. "You can come in; momsey's finished scolding me. I want a new grey suit—all my friends have grey suits!"

"Well, of all things!" Elinor's tone was exasperated. "Another new suit—when Annette and I have been wearing our old ones all winter! That's so like you, Tina, never considering where the money is to come from."

"I don't care where the money comes from! Annette, don't you think I can have it?"

"It seems a little foolish, dear—unless you could wear it later in the season," began Annette pacifically. "By the way, I heard you say that Francis wasn't coming here. I thought he was going to take you and Edith to the school concert to-night."

"No; Robert's going to take us," said Tina. She detached herself from her sisters' embrace and ran away, with the black poodle after her.

"Robert," repeated Elinor meditatively; she sat down in the chair her mother had just vacated and stared at Annette. "How very odd! Robert has never taken Tina anywhere. She must have written to him. That child does the most unexpected things! I was wondering last night if I would care for Robert if he were quite different. Some men have such a brutal streak in them. On the other hand, you like a man to know his own mind and keep to it."

"Yes, indeed," assented Annette absently. She dropped down on the lounge. "Joseph and I were figuring last night that if we had two dollars more a month we might really get married. That would include the twenty-five cents a week for doctor's bills—I suppose we ought to allow that." She stopped a moment to switch onto another track. "It seemed to me there was something odd in Tina's manner this morning, Elinor; I think she has some plan about Francis!"

As that week went on, and the next and the next, it became apparent to all that there was a change in the dear little youngest. She threw herself into her studies with exemplary conscientiousness, she performed her small, appointed tasks with the modicum of fractiousness. She went out nowhere. She was as lively and capricious as she had al-

ways been, and although she celebrated her eighteenth birthday, seemed younger than ever; but through it all there was an odd change—an absence of earnestness when she was earnest, an absence of mirth when she was mirthful. In some unexplained way Tina wasn't with them; something ineffably bright and soul-inspiring had dropped out of the household. The loss of it made a growing little undercurrent of uneasiness, of anxiety. Through all the daily living there is in every home a fateful knowledge of the unexpressed.

It is impossible to hide one's secrets. The whole family felt sure that Tina was thinking of Francis Fanshawe, though she never even looked out of the window when he spun past it, as sometimes happened, in his big, white motor car, filled with a gay crowd of bugle-blowing boys. Elinor, with the tacit consent of her elders, actually wrote a note inviting him to the house. He came, indeed, but Tina refused to see him, playing checkers upstairs in the library with Robert, who had a meditative, humorous way of beating her, while Elinor, perforce, did the entertaining. The big youth was not unpleasing, as she owned afterwards, though he said next to nothing, but his blue eyes looked unusually appreciative and he gripped her hand so hard

when he left that her fingers were nearly welded into each other.

It was at the end of the month that Tina came into her mother's room one morning with an unexpected rush, her golden head thrown back, the black poodle barking delightedly at her heels. There was a note in her voice which had not been there in these four weeks past, as she said:

"Momsey, I've something to say to you."

"Well, come over here, dear. I want to hook you up; your dress is all open in the back. I wish you would be more careful. Isn't it time for you to go to your lessons?"

"I'm not going to study any more, mother."

"My dear child, what do you mean?"

"I've decided that I want to get married," said Tina—"to Francis." A wave of colour rose suddenly over her lovely face, and she made an annoyed motion as if to brush it away. "Annette knows I want to marry him. I wanted her to tell you, but she said you wouldn't like it unless I told you myself. So now I'm telling you. And I hope you won't mind very much, for Francis and I will never care for any one else."

"Oh, my dear child!" said Mrs. Malison. Mother and daughter looked at each other with the same expression of dominant will.

"This is, of course, nonsense, Tina." She braced herself as one does against a coming blow so appalling that one cannot stop to fear the weight of it; all one's energies must be used to fend it off.

"It distresses me to hear you talk like this; you don't mean it—you don't know *what* it means; but it distresses me, Tina!"

"There, I knew you'd say that!" cried Tina in poignant remonstrance. She dropped into her favourite attitude of hunched up shoulders, her lips set in scornful bitterness. "Every one lectures me and scolds me—nobody wants me to do anything I like except Francis. Even Robert lectures me, though he's such a muff with Elinor! I know none of you like Francis. I know you all despise him, but he's a thousand times nicer to me than any one else is. He likes me to have everything I want."

"Oh, Tina!" said poor Mrs. Malison, her heart pierced with twenty daggers. "Of course, I'm not saying —— If you still care for him in a couple of years, then, perhaps, your father and I may consider it. But you can't know your own mind now, my darling. You have seen nothing of life; marriage is a very serious thing."

"Then I don't want to wait until I know about life, if it's as horrid as you say it is!"

said Tina, hotly. "I don't want to wait until I change my mind. I'll never change it. I made Francis stay away on purpose all last month to see what it would be like—and I *hated* it—and so did he." Tina's voice had the ring of a passionate conviction, her blue eyes had a sombre depth of melancholy in them. "Why do we have to wait for years and years like Annette and Joseph when it isn't necessary? Mother, why can't Francis and I be married? My grandmother was married at sixteen."

"And would you leave your father and me, Tina, when we've taken care of you, and loved you, so much?" Mrs. Malison's voice shook, she fastened her eyes on her daughter with anguish. Tina's mouth took on the obstinate curve which the too obvious appeal to her affections always brought there. She didn't even take the trouble to answer as she tapped irritatingly on the floor with her small foot. The silence conveyed even more forcibly than words that it was a recognized fact that people left their parents when they married without discredit attaching to them—it was part of the plan. Even through her wretchedness Mrs. Malison drearily acquiesced in the received view of the matter! but for Tina —her baby—— Ah, that was a different thing.

For Tina's own good this time she must not have her way.

The mother went around all day with a stone on her heart, that made her face white and drawn and breathing difficult, while Annette and Elinor talked excitedly and incessantly with household avocations half done, and sought the dear little wayward sister separately afterwards, Annette with mute caresses, and larges pieces of bread and jam to supplement the lack of a breakfast, and Elinor with intelligent reasoning as she put the child's collar straight and fastened her belt. Tina had never dressed herself alone in her life. "I thought I cared for Tommy Burns, Tina, when I was seventeen, and as for even looking at him now ——! When it comes down to it, dear, what men have you ever seen?"

"I've seen—Robert," said Tina dangerously, under her breath.

Elinor's arms fell away from her office of tiring woman; she stood staring.

"Robert ——?"

Tina's eyes gleamed with a daring, revealing, lightning flash: "Well, if you're never nice to a person yourself, Elinor ——" She escaped to the doorway for a parting shot.

"Yes, *Robert!*" she called back elfishly, and fled, passing her mother with no recogni-

tion, and actually going out in young Fanshawe's car with him for all the afternoon, only coming back in time for dinner, which was a state function, with guests, and going to bed immediately afterwards.

It is strange how one untoward event disrupts all the working order of the mind; that which has given joy loses its flavour, that which has been counted on as sure becomes fluctuant. Everything has to arrange itself anew. If Elinor wrote a note to a Robert who had neglected to appear, it was not from the dictates of reason, but from a novel and jealous desire for his presence. If Annette and Joseph sat up unusually late after the guests had departed it was, perhaps, because figuring over a housekeeping text-book wasn't as satisfying as sometimes, and they had to keep at it a little longer to capture the pleasure of that future living together. Even to the most unselfish, the most vernally patient of lovers waiting may show a grim face, all "bare of bliss" at times, especially when confronted with a boy of twenty-one who has money and to spare for that leap over the matrimonial barriers. It was only after thoroughly studying a mysterious way of Approaching a Butcher, by which, although special cuts and roasts were so much a pound, you got a whole diagrammic ox for a dollar,

that that prophetic feeling of happiness mingled once more with the lovers' good-night kiss. Heaven only knows what delicate sentiment was embedded in those visionary steaks and chops!

Long after Joseph had gone Mrs Malison and Annette talked in the mother's room, with low, painfully murmuring voices, taking counsel together into the small hours. It was three of the clock when the hurrying of soft footsteps and a touch at the chamber door startled them, and then a piteous voice:

"Momsey; oh, momsey!"

The mother was up on the instant, opening the door; by the light in the hall, Tina's eyes, ice-blue, stared at her over the lace frills of her night-dress. "I came to tell you—if you feel like that—the way you looked to-day—I'll tell Francis I won't marry him; it will *kill* me; but if you are happy it doesn't make any difference. I can't *stand* seeing you look like that! It will kill me, but you'll be happier, any way."

"Oh, dear me!" said Mrs. Malison in despair—anxiety lent roughness to her voice. "This is nonsense, Tina. Come up-stairs this minute. The idea! with nothing on your feet—you'll get your death of cold." She led the girl to her own bed, tucking the soft form with resolute fingers, and lying

down herself afterwards under the coverlet with her cheek against Tina's chill flesh.

"Oh, Tina, as if mother could ever be glad if you were unhappy! It's just because I fear that if you have what you want that it will only be for your unhappiness that I look as I do. If your father were only at home!"

Tina gave a movement of impatience, though she lay close cuddled in her mother's arms. "I think it would have been a great deal better if we had eloped—Francis and I," she murmured.

"Tina!" The mother gave a horrified gasp.

"Well, I do think so—it would have saved everything, all the feeling so badly, and the talk, and everything. Francis and I wanted to go off in the automobile this afternoon and get married then, and settle it all at once. People never seem to mind a bit after it's all over—the Boggses made such a fuss about Lucy's marrying that widower and now nobody says a word about it. She comes to Sunday-night's tea with *his* children."

"But you didn't elope, my darling," said Mrs. Malison, searching for the one crumb of comfort.

"Francis thought you might mind."

"That was *very* right of Francis."

"And he was afraid the car would break

down; he had to take it to the garage for repairs."

"Oh, dear!" sighed the poor mother once more.

It was only after Tina seemed to be asleep that she stole down-stairs again to drop into an uneasy slumber herself.

This battle was going to be a long and weary fray.

They were all down unusually early to breakfast but Tina.

"Don't waken Miss Tina," Mrs. Malison warned the maid.

"Sure she's not in the house, ma'am." Emma's tone was glibly important. "Bridget said as how Miss Tina slipped out at six o'clock this morning; she came down the stairs a tiptoe in her new grey shuit. 'Twas towards the trolley car she wint."

It had happened then already—the blow had fallen! The headstrong child had gone. Mrs. Malison whispered the words with lips that could hardly frame the words. Other people's daughters had deceived them and done this thing—she had felt shamed for them—but hers! The room went around with her, some one was bringing her water. She saw the scared faces of Annette and Elinor bending over her—the moments seemed like dreary years as they passed.

The square, marble-pillared clock, in its old-fashioned glass case on the mantel, chimed eight musically as Tina came into the room. Her blue hat with its white feathers was pushed sideways on her rumpled hair, and the new grey suit was wrinkled and spotted with clay from an enormous pot of daisies hugged tightly in her arms. She set it down hastily on the white cloth of the breakfast table, and leaned back, panting, against the mahogany sideboard laden with its tall old silver; the light from the parting of the heavy curtains leaped towards her, and held her in its shining embrace.

"I didn't know that was going to be so heavy. The trolleys were *so* slow, they wouldn't connect. I went to get the flowers for you, momsey, because you're so fond of them."

Her eyes took swift tally of the group, unheeding of their exclamations. "Please leave the room, Emma——" she went on speaking with a defiant hardness, broken now and then by an odd, piteous little catch in her young voice:

"I suppose you thought I'd eloped. I promise you now that I won't; I won't get married until you and daddy say I can. I'll wait *forever* if you say so. I can't bear to hurt any one's feelings. But I'll never be

happy here at home any more, and I'll never care for anybody here. I may act as if I cared, but I won't, really! I'll only care for Francis—as he cares for me." The wind from some far source seemed to shake her with its ruthless power. "You think I'm so young—you make me younger than I really am so that I don't know how to tell you what I mean—to tell you so that you'll understand. When I'm with Francis he doesn't need to speak, he doesn't even need to be *near* me; but I'm just so happy!" Her voice had changed to the exquisite cadence of love. "It's my *own* life! And whether I'm glad or sorry, I want to spend it with him. I want to be with him anyway—I want to be with him if I *die* for it!"

She put her hand on her heart with a quick, passionate gesture, her ice-blue eyes had in them that look which is as old as the world, as deep as life. She stepped past the weeping sisters to throw herself on her knees by her mother, to hide her bright head upon her mother's breast, to reach her young arms up to clasp around her mother's neck as she whispered:

"Oh, mother, mother, *you ought to know!*"

* * * * *

"It certainly was a beautiful wedding!"

Little Miss Ward was calling once more at the Malisons; her voice was earnestly kind. "How lovely Miss Annette and Miss Elinor looked. I never saw girls keep their looks so well! And Miss Elinor engaged, too, at *last!* Every one was so surprised at Miss Tina's getting married so soon. Mr. Fanshawe seemed very happy, I shouldn't wonder if there really was more to him than people think; he shook my hand so—*cordially*, it's a little lame yet. And as for the bride"—Miss Ward lowered her voice tenderly—"well, Mrs. Grandison said, when she saw that child's sweet, young face going up the aisle, there was something so pathetic about it that she just broke down and gave up and cried, when she thought of all that might be before her. Have you ever thought what a lottery life is?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Malison. She had indeed! For good or for evil the portion of the youngest was Tina's. She had had, as always, her own way.

Polly Townsend's Rebellion

Polly Townsend's Rebellion

THE goings forth and the comings back of the head of a suburban household are the pendulum by which all the rest of the time swings. Polly Townsend, in a short white duck skirt, with a cheerful red bow in her light hair, was putting the finishing touches to the dinner-table in the now permanent absence of the "girl," and listening for the returning footstep of her husband with more than her usual sense of expectation, which lately had been braced to divine what that footstep might imply as to the day's success or non-success.

Mr. Townsend was "out of a position," a stage of tenuous existence over which self-respecting families draw a decent veil. In the three months of his detachment he had experienced all its usual effects in his relations with a comfortably occupied world—the sympathetic indignation and inefficient, helpful efforts in his behalf, with the haphazard, temporary "jobs," the gradual subsidence of poignant interest, and, finally, the semi-irritation at his "not having anything yet,"

which would really seem to imply a culpable torpidity on his part to all but the wife who alone knew the struggle which he no longer heralded abroad. Her indignation daily burned stronger against the friends who couldn't seem to do anything for him, but who were themselves successful without half of his talent.

She herself had done what she could, besides looking after the house and the two children. For ten weeks she had secretly given music lessons to the child of a friend, steadily refusing payment until the end of the term, and she now held in the little bag at her belt the princely sum of seven dollars and fifty cents, all her own, and destined for great uses. Mrs. Townsend was, above all things, a woman of action, and to resolve was to dare immediately.

It was with a faint sigh of farewell to a hope barely entertained that she heard the aggressive briskness of her husband's tread, and she answered the florid cheerfulness of his greeting with the studied carelessness of custom in the well-worn words:

"Nothing new to-day, I suppose?"

"No, nothing new," said Mr. Townsend heartily. He was a large, attractive-looking man, with the slightly greyish hair which had handicapped him so much in getting a po-

sition, though his wife was eagerly ready to tell every one how really young he was.

"Dinner's about ready, I see; well I'm ready for it." He relapsed into a chair by the table as he spoke. "Where are the children?"

"They're spending the evening at the Mays'," said his wife, bringing in the hot dishes from the kitchen and taking quick note of his unconscious lassitude and the new wrinkles in his broad forehead. "We can have a quiet, little cozy time all by ourselves. Would you mind tying the thread around this rag on my finger? I sliced it when I was peeling the potatoes."

"You dash at everything so," remonstrated the husband, accomplishing the thread-tying slowly and painstakingly. "I should think you would learn to be more careful after you had burned yourself so badly. Stand still. Don't be in such a hurry; the dinner can wait."

"No, it can't," said Mrs. Townsend, escaping to the head of the table. "Have you seen any one to-day?"

"About seven hundred people."

"Francis! You know what I mean. Have you seen any one I know?"

"No. Yes, I did see Harry Jenkins for a moment."

"What did he have to say?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, Francis!" Mrs. Townsend looked despairing. "Why do you make me drag things out of you this way? Didn't he tell you anything about his wife's return from England ——?"

"Not a word."

"And you didn't ask ——?"

"My dear Polly, I saw him for about two seconds, crossing the street on his way to the tailor's. If that can give you any satisfaction you're welcome to it."

"I wish you could go to the tailor's," said Mrs. Townsend deeply, with a sudden moistening of her luminous grey eyes. "I wish—I wish your clothes weren't getting so—so ——"

"It will soon be cold enough for my overcoat," said her husband consolingly.

"Yes, I know, but—Francis! I've been wanting to speak to you for ever so long. Those trousers you have on—really, you know they were always perfectly hideous. I nearly cried when you brought them home. How a man who has always dressed as well as you have could ever have chosen those things! Of course, I know you only bought them because they were so cheap, but there's always a choice. And now they're so shabby

it makes me positively sick to see you in them. Last Sunday when you passed the plate in church—well, you thought I went out because I was faint, but it was simply because I couldn't sit there and see you walk up the aisle and stand in front of the whole congregation until that anthem was finished."

"Let's change the subject," said Mr. Townsend. "It's a fine day."

"No, I won't change the subject. Do you know they're advertising trousers at Brooker's—such a good place!—for six dollars. Mrs. Bond says her husband got two pairs there yesterday—the very best quality. And—I want you to buy a pair to-morrow. She says they wear forever."

"Where could I get the six dollars?" asked Mr. Townsend facetiously.

"I knew you'd say that. Oh, Francis! I have the money right here. I earned it myself." Mrs. Townsend rose and swept her chair down beside her husband. "I never told you a word, but I've been giving Alice May music lessons ever since—Francis! Now see here, you're not going to mind! How perfectly absurd! It's been a real pleasure. Mrs. May paid me seven dollars and a-half to-day. Now, Francis, I want you to take this money and buy those trousers to-morrow."

"Well, I'll see myself—farther," said Mr. Townsend comprehensively. He half rose, and pushed her gently from him. "I'd like to see myself take—take your little money. Spend it on yourself, now you've got it, or on the children if you want to—heaven knows you need things badly enough! I won't touch a cent of it."

"But, Francis, you must! You never can get a position dressed as you are; you look like—— Clothes make such a difference! Oh, I didn't want to say it, but—Francis, you've got to take the money." She strove to put it in his pocket, and he thrust forth her hand with a grip that held her slender wrist like a vise.

"It's no use, Polly. You don't know how your having to earn it hurts me; I haven't the right to forbid it, but"—he stopped, and forced down something—"I haven't come to such a pass that I'll take your money to buy my clothes." He fixed her sternly with a masterful eye. "There's no use in your persisting. I'll tell you once for all that I won't do it; and I don't want to hear any more on the subject."

"Very well," said Mrs. Townsend soothingly, in the tone of one who bides her time. She added afterwards in protest, "You haven't half eaten your dinner—and I took such pains with it."

"I think—you make it so nicely—but I think I'm just a little tired of stew," said Mr. Townsend apologetically.

Later she found him rummaging in his closet, appearing as he heard her step to say explanatorily:

"I want to see if I can't find another pair of trousers to wear to-morrow. I guess I'd better leave these I have on for you to fix up a little. The fact is—I didn't tell you before, for I don't want you to raise your hopes in any way—but I've at last got an appointment for the day after to-morrow to see Mr. Effingham."

"An appointment with Mr. Effingham! Oh, Francis!"

"Cartwright's letter was what did it. Cartwright says Effingham is the kind of a fellow who either likes you or doesn't like you, straight off the bat. I tell you, I think a lot of Cartwright's writing all the way from Chicago about this, taking so much pains for a man that's almost a stranger to him."

"Oh, you never do anything for people yourself!" said his wife sarcastically.

"I never did anything for Cartwright—except put his wife once on the right train," said Mr. Townsend. "Now, what's the matter with these trousers?" He held up a pair for inspection. "They look all right."

"Oh, nothing's the matter, nothing whatever," said his wife scornfully, "except that they're full of moth holes. Those are the winter trousers—the only good pair you had—that you left at your sister's—you said you could get them any time—and she had them stuffed into a dark closet this summer while she was away in the country; she just sent them over Monday."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Mr. Townsend hastily. "You'd better get rid of them. Now, here's a pair—I didn't know I had any so good."

"Those are the ones you painted the attic in last spring," said Mrs. Townsend, "and the pair next are what you keep for fishing. Those belong to your dress-suit, and the ones beyond are too short, and worn all over so that you were afraid to put them on."

Mr. Townsend surveyed the last named with raised eyebrows and a consenting, cornerwise glance at his wife. "Yes, they are pretty bad—but I guess I'd better wear them to-morrow while you fix up these."

"Francis, if you're going to see Mr. Effingham you'll just have to buy a pair of trousers."

He turned on her sternly as he said: "Didn't I tell you not to speak of it?"

"Yes, but I will speak of it!" Mrs. Town-

send hurled herself into the fray. "Francis, I can't help it! When I think of all you've suffered, and all you've done, and how much depends now on—oh, my dearest!" she tried to put her head on an eluding shoulder as she followed him around the room, flushed with her eloquence — "please take this money. If you knew how happy I'd been all the time to think that I was working for you, and how I had set my heart on it, you wouldn't be so unkind. I know I told you my shoes were bad, but they do quite well as they are, and the children do not need warm underwear yet. It was very stupid of me to talk of it, and it will make all the difference how you are dressed when you go to see Mr. Effingham. You've often said what a difference a person's appearance made—and it's so unlike you to look shabby! You ought to do everything to try and get that position; you can't afford to lose the ghost of a chance. You are so foolish, you won't listen to reason! Oh, Francis, won't you stand still and answer me?"

"Yes, I'll answer you," said Mr. Townsend deliberately. "You can 'reason,' as you call it, until you're blind. Once for all, I will never take that money."

"You will."

"I will not. Now, Polly not another

word; do you hear? Not another word!"

"Very well," said Mrs. Townsend, as before with conventional obedience, and followed the words with a reckless flash of her grey eyes as she left the room, murmuring with quick breath: "But I give you fair warning, I'll make you take that money yet; I don't care whether you're angry or not. You'll see, you'll see!"

If the subject was dropped from speech afterwards it was nevertheless present in thought. Mr. Townsend rose late in the morning, as is the habit of the man "out of a position," who has no place on the early trains into town with his customary confrères, the workers, or in their busy offices. The heads of departments whom he goes in to see are only accessible in the later hours, and a delayed breakfast obviates the necessity for luncheon. When husband and wife parted, he in the trousers that were a good deal too short and a good deal too worn, she, indeed, broke through the ice with temerity to adjure him for goodness sake not to let any one see him to-day with those on, and he had retorted grimly that he would endeavour to keep his hundred and eighty pounds entirely invisible to oblige her.

During the course of the morning Mrs.

Townsend went around with knitted brows, pondering deeply over the vexed question. Her back ached and her feet were weary long before her household labours were ended. She wasn't accustomed to doing her own work, and, though she was willing, experience, that time-saver, was not hers. Mrs. Townsend knew that ladies were popularly supposed to bring a deftness and daintiness to kitchen work that was lacking in the efforts of a rougher class, but for herself it was just the opposite. The scalding kettles and saucepans she carried would perform a tremolo movement with the shaking of her slight wrists that sent greasy splashes of the contents over the kitchen floor; the beefsteak she broiled took in not only the fire but the whole top of the range in its sputterings, and plates and dishes, whether empty or filled with food for the table, slipped from her tired fingers and broke with ruinous celerity. After all the ceaseless effort of her heroic incapacity she was forced to long for the look of shining cleanliness accomplished easily by the strong, accustomed arms of an ordinary "girl."

And the children were going half-clothed, she had so little time to sew! If this sort of thing didn't stop soon she didn't know what would become of them all. Depression had

grown to be her usual frame of mind in the morning when there was no one to look at her. She had known that Francis couldn't get a place when he was so shabby. People were afraid of men who looked poor; it seemed as if they couldn't be capable. In spite of himself she must save him, though he hurled javelins at her afterwards. She would have gone and bought him the trousers out of hand if remembrance had not brought uncomfortably to mind a time when she had tried to demonstrate how economically she could regulate his smoking by purchasing an advertized box of cigars from a department store. To Polly Townsend, if you did a certain thing one certain effect ought to follow—that, instead, it ramified off into all sorts of different ways was the mean advantage life took over theory. She felt now that if she could only make her Francis buy those trousers he couldn't help realizing gratefully afterwards how wise and good she'd been, and her heart glowed at the prospect.

But Mr. Effingham! He was a man whose old-fashioned punctiliousness was notably affected by externals: by suitable dress, by polish of manner, by a certain air in addition to more solid requirements. It was bad enough for Francis to hand the plate in those hideous, old, faded, mended trousers,

but to go supplicantly in them to Mr. Effingham would be suicidal. She could have wept at the thought.

Yet later in the day Mrs. Townsend might have been seen with a face lightened by a persistent smile—a jimpy, sly, inwardly-lurking, swiftly-flashing, three-cornered gleam that took in two reckless eyes and a demure mouth, and brought forth curious comment from Mrs. Whymer, a friend whom she met in the street.

"How well you do look! No one would think you had a girl of ten—but you always did have colour. I feel all dragged out; the doctor says I'm just going on my nerves. My husband has been home all day. No, there's nothing really the matter with him, just one of his attacks, but he always gets so worried about himself. I often tell him, when he sits there looking so depressed, if he only knew all I go through without saying a word! Having a man around the house is so upsetting, but I suppose you're used to it. Mr. Townsend hasn't anything yet, I believe?"

"He has several positions in view," said Mrs. Townsend with elegant indefiniteness, and a quick, hot resentment at the implied reproach, which was answerable for the expenditure of twenty-five cents of her little

hoard for peaches to be used in the manufacture of the deep peach pie which her Francis loved.

She derived an exquisite satisfaction from outwitting him in this way, forcing her money thus secretly down his throat, watching him eat each mouthful, and meeting his raised eyebrows and the "Isn't this a little extravagant?" with the reassuring answer:

"Now, it's all right; I just want you to enjoy it. No, Frankie, no more; you had a large plateful."

"You made papa be helped three times," said Frankie.

Her husband put an affectionate arm around her when she came up-stairs afterwards. "Fixed those trousers for me to-day, dear?"

"Yes, I fixed them," said Mrs. Townsend.

"That's a good girl. These I have on now—I don't believe they'd last over another day."

"You see Mr. Effingham to-morrow, don't you?"

"Why, yes, I believe I do," said Mr. Townsend with an effect of carelessness. Heaven only knew how their two thoughts travelled together in that long hopefulness that must have an end somewhere in something tangible. Yet even as they sat there Mr. Town-

send became conscious of a not unknown quantity.

"What do you want to keep kissing my hand for? What have you been doing? You haven't lamed your back again moving the flour-barrel, I hope. See here," his tone suddenly stiffened, "you haven't been spending that money of yours for——"

"No," said Mrs. Townsend hurriedly. "Not a penny; well, just a few cents for peaches."

"Oh, I knew you bought them," said Mr. Townsend indulgently. "Well, that pie was awfully good, but don't do so any more. I don't like it, Polly; it hurts."

"Very well," said Mrs. Townsend in an odd voice. She faced him with gleaming eyes. "I'll never do anything that doesn't please you, no matter how foolish it is. If you say the sky is pea-green I'll say it is pea-green, too. And if you want to kill yourself I'll bring the carbolic acid. Oh, yes, I'm to be just too sweet for anything and never say boo when you want to go out looking like a tramp and ruin every chance you have just because it 'hurts you' to take this money from me, from your own wife. Haven't I a right to earn money for you, and love and help you, and work my fingers off for you, if I want to?" Her voice trembled. "Wouldn't I rather go barefoot than see the

way you've looked this last month?" She refused to quail before his gaze as she went on piteously: "Oh, you're so exactly like a man. I know you just hate to hear me talk like this. I know I'll never convince you in this wide world, but some things hurt *me!* Francis——"

"Well," said Mr. Townsend as she stopped short. He had withdrawn his arm from around her.

"I want you to take that money."

"I think I'll go down and read for a while if you don't mind," said Mr. Townsend dryly.

Francis Townsend was always a punctilious man as to his toilette, but the next morning he made it a sort of continuous performance. Mrs. Townsend down-stairs, "redding up" the place after the children, and keeping his breakfast hot, felt her heart thump and sink alternately as she heard his footstep advance and retreat interminably on the floor above. Her coat and hat lay upon a chair, in furtherance of her morning journey to market, but no matter what she was doing her eyes turned, in spite of herself, to the place set for Francis at the end of the table, where there was a fringed napkin, a plate, a knife and fork, and a coffee-cup with the unusual addition of a little roll of greenbacks sticking up in it. Prepared as she was for some commo-

tion she involuntarily clutched a chair back as she caught the sound of a quick and angry stride across the room above to the hall, and heard the tone of towering wrath:

"Polly!"

"Yes, Francis."

"Did you cut off the leg of this pair of trousers?"

"Your breakfast's in the oven," said Mrs. Townsend glibly, "and the coffee's on the stove. I've got to go to market." She flung herself into her jacket and hat as she spoke, jabbing in the hatpins viciously. The triumph was exciting, but she didn't know she was going to be quite so scared. She hesitated a moment, and then called back: "Good-bye, dearest!" as she closed the hall door and then ran down the steps into the street.

* * * * *

"Seventy-five cents for each dancing lesson, but if there are two in the family she makes a reduction."

Mrs. Whymer sat rocking idly while she watched Mrs. Townsend basting seams on a dark piece of cloth, in her little sewing-room.

"I'll see about it to-morrow when I'm in town," said Mrs. Townsend.

"Going shopping? If you want that skirt pattern I'll get it for you."

"Thank you, I would like it," said Mrs. Townsend, "though I'm not going shopping exactly; I have to take Pinky to the dentist's —it's so long since she's been—but I may get some material for myself on the way home."

Her husband had been for several months with Mr. Effingham, and they were just about beginning to get their feet on the first rungs of the ladder which leads to the plateau of Living Like Other People.

"Why on earth did you cut up those trousers to make knickerbockers for Frankie?" said the other, taking up the end of Mrs. Townsend's work. "They look just like new, and the cloth doesn't seem worn at all."

"It isn't," said Mrs. Townsend briefly; "Mr. Townsend only had them on a few times. They are the best material, they were bought at Brooker's, and I thought he'd get such good wear out of them, but he says there's something wrong with the cut."

"Well, it's no use to try and make a man wear anything he doesn't want to," said Mrs. Whymer. She yawned as she rose. "You don't say I've been here over an hour! I do get so lonesome at home all day, and Mr. Whymer is working until eleven o'clock every night. I'm thinking of going to that new sanitarium at Westly for a while. I really

haven't been able to do a thing for the last six weeks. I get so tired out ordering the meals, and the doctor thinks I had better try a rest cure. Your husband likes it with Mr. Effingham, I hear. He was very fortunate in getting the position. Mr. Butts tried for it, but he always looked so—well, not up-to-date, you know. Clothes do make such a difference."

"That's what I always say," returned Mrs. Townsend demurely, with a queer little hazy, retrospective smile, that was somehow wistful, too. Her wisdom had certainly been vindicated, yet there were results that, as usual, eluded theory. She was never quite sure whether her rebellion had been a success or not. The time might come when she and her Francis would laugh over it together in company—but it hadn't come yet.

The Mother of Emily

The Mother of Emily

"IF I had only the foundation, but I haven't that, or the trimming, either; nothing but this old, tumbled *chiffon* and these faded flowers."

Mrs. Briarley looked dejectedly at the mass of frippery in her lap. Five dollars for a new hat such as she wanted would leave only one dollar from her own private purse for the Easter collection, and the sermon last Sunday had been a plea for religious enthusiasm in giving at this season.

Mrs. Briarley was a fair, pretty little thing, although slight almost to meagreness in her immaturity of outline. She was foolishly young to be the wife of a man of thirty and the mother of a two-year-old child.

In spite of this she had an earnest soul, and pondered deeply over each perplexing question of her married life as it arose. The mere fact of having to decide anything enveloped her in a sort of confusion which obscured every guide-post which experience had erected, the more so that, as her husband travelled, she could not have recourse to him. It was as if each occasion had been evolved

whole from space to have its merits decided upon, whether it were a question of little Emily's going out to play in the damp, or the quantity of material for a new skirt, or which kind of breakfast food to order.

Just now it was the question of the hat. There was indeed no question as to whether she needed it or not, but her husband's means kept her within certain limits.

To make a whole hat would cost very nearly five dollars; if other people did it for less, she wasn't able to. And Mr. Beatoun, the clergyman, had said that he wanted to make an appeal to each one personally. Each one must judge for himself if he were doing all he could to pay off that debt on the church for which he urged the special effort now.

To Mrs. Briarley the question seemed to have relation to those deep places of decision which govern the current of one's life. If she refused this appeal she would not be quite what the mother of Emily ought to be.

She was painfully anxious that Emily should have every advantage. She herself had been a neglected orphan, brought up in helter-skelter fashion, and she longed above all things that her baby should have the maternal ideal she had lacked. She was glad that Mr. Beatoun's sermon had come after she had bought little Emily's hat, for

she felt secretly that no appeal could have been strong enough to have denied that sweet white ribbon and the daisies to her child.

"If I had *any* trimming that could be used!" she murmured for the third time, and turned as the servant came into the room. "What is it, Ellen?"

"There's a lady down-stairs, ma'am—Mrs. Stebbins."

"Oh, Mrs. *Stebbins!*" Mrs. Briarley's tone was one of doubtful welcome.

This was one of the ladies of the parish in which Mrs. Briarley was a newcomer, and in which she still felt herself wistfully an outsider, in spite of the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Beatoun had formally called upon her, and Mrs. Stebbins had conscientiously shaken hands with her at the church door.

But Mrs. Stebbins had also once come to collect, and to collect now, in addition to an appeal, would be futile as far as Mrs. Briarley was concerned.

She nerved herself to meet the words that followed after the first greetings were over.

"I want to know if you won't give something to our church sale."

"The church sale? Oh, no, I—I don't think I care to be connected with anything

of the kind—at least—I mean, this year," said Mrs. Briarley, hurriedly.

The last time she had taken part in a fair, before moving to this place, her sympathy had run unwarrantably ahead of her purse. She had indulged in that specious form of charity which consists of buying goods on credit and then presenting them to the church. She had a vivid remembrance of a box of soap which another woman had bought for half price at the fair, "because it was given, and whatever was made on it was clear gain."

Mrs. Briarley had had to pay the full price at the grocer's a month later, when the bill was already too large. Her husband had not liked it, and she felt wary of fairs.

"A fair! Oh, no, indeed, this isn't a fair!" Mrs. Stebbins, a sallow, greyish, compactly solid lady in a short walking-skirt and a small, tight hat, smiled intelligently at her hostess. "It's a sale—a rummage sale. I'm surprised that you haven't heard of it; it's been in progress two weeks already. Of course, though, you don't belong to the Guild. There are only three days more for the sale, and we *do* want them to be a success. The proceeds go to the church debt. A rummage sale—you know what that is. You send any old things you have—*any*thing; it doesn't

make any difference what it is, and we sell them to the poor for a few cents. We hired an empty store at the other end of the town —64 Herkimer Street. Some of our ladies take charge of it in turn."

"And do you sell much?" asked Mrs. Briarley.

Mrs. Stebbins laughed. "Do we sell much? We have made fifteen hundred dollars already. You know it's really an accommodation to the poor—many of them will buy things when they wouldn't beg for them. They get good warm clothing and stores for a song. And quite a number of us pick up odds and ends there—really! You don't know what fascinating things we take in now and then; nobody knows where half of them come from. Some of them are quite new. There was a lovely jacket sent in last week; Mr. Stebbins's sister said she would have bought it herself—she doesn't live here—if the sleeves had been a little longer. And there was a white satin lambrequin, embroidered in gold thread,—one end had oil spilled over it,—and Minnie Ware bought it for a quarter, and she's made the most fetching collar and vest front that you ever saw. Of course, Minnie Ware can do *anything*—she doesn't care a snap who knows. Have you met Miss Ware? She belongs to the Guild."

"No," said Mrs. Briarley, with the pang of the outsider.

"Well, I bought a colonial chair myself there yesterday; there's a rung gone, but it can easily be put in. You *will* send something, won't you? Some of our ladies are in charge from nine until six."

"Why, I'll try to," said Mrs. Briarley, hesitatingly. "We got rid of most of our rubbish when we moved here. Is Mrs. Beatoun at the sale?"

She had a reverential admiration for the rector's wife, as a person who in that position must be superhumanly good. She longed to know her as other people did. She had been sensitively quick to feel the alteration from the conventional politeness of Mrs. Beatoun's manner to her to the intimate interchange of laughing remarks with a party of friends afterwards. Mrs. Briarley had indeed been asked to join the Guild, but she could not get up her courage to face so many strangers alone.

"No, Mrs. Beatoun will not be at the sale to-day," said Mrs. Stebbins, rising to go. "I've just come from the rectory now. She had such a pleasant surprise—the present of a lovely hat from her cousin. She had to go into mourning for her mother-in-law, and so she sent this hat to Mrs. Beatoun, it was

made in Paris, and I don't believe it was ever worn more than twice. It's a perfect beauty!"

"That must have been very nice," said Mrs. Briarley, with the thought of the hat for which she longed.

"Well, I should think so! To get a hat like that without paying a cent! And if ever anybody needed one it was Mrs. Beatoun. She's worn that old black straw for five years; but after all, you'd hardly know it. She's got that sort of an air about her—almost too much for a clergyman's wife, some people think—that makes you feel as if she *was* dressed up when she isn't. Is this your little girl?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Briarley, with the tremulous flush that always came into her cheek when little, dark-curled, lustrous-eyed Emily suddenly appeared in her dainty white frock and little slippers. She looked at her visitor with an expression which said, "Did you ever see anything as beautiful as this?"

But Mrs. Stebbins only remarked, "She favours her papa, doesn't she? I don't see much resemblance to you," patted the child's head, shook hands with Mrs. Briarley, and was gone, with a parting injunction not to forget the rummage sale.

Mrs. Briarley knelt down on the floor by Emily that she might gather the plump little

standing form more fully into her thin young arms. She loved and respected her husband greatly, but her humble soul magnified the Lord daily for this wonder and joy of being the mother of Emily. She had a way of pressing the little soft cheek to hers, as now, and saying, "Baby *dear*," in a tone of ineffable love, that at once embodied her bliss and a prayer that she might be worthy of it. When she left the child now she knew that there was only one path to choose. She must go without her hat. She *must* respond to the appeal.

She thought of it all the time she was selecting her slender dole of rubbish for the sale —a vase that had been mended and a couple of books. As she was walking to Herkimer Street she imagined herself in a ninety-eight-cent, ready-trimmed straw turban. One could hardly realize how earnestly solemn the sacrifice was to her.

Dress was a very serious matter. She had a natural daintiness, a touch that was almost genius. It was a feminine charm which even her husband recognized, and she liked to see him like to look at her. Perhaps he would not now. If she could only have a hat given her, like fortunate Mrs. Beatoun!

The window of the temporary shop was filled with a heterogeneous mass of clothing,

before which stood a group of hatless women and a few children. Mrs. Briarley nervously pushed her way past them, for she was always afraid of contagion on account of Emily. She became still more nervous on her entrance into the shop.

It was filled with a swarm of Italian women, bright-shawled, earringed, swarthy and voluble, fingering the piles of cast-off clothing and chaffering over them. The air was bad, and the two young girls behind the counter looked singularly helpless and distracted. One was sitting down with her head upon her hand, but the other responded to Mrs. Briarley's proffer of her gifts.

"Oh, yes—thank you! *Would* you please put the price on them yourself? Here are tags and a pencil. Mark them *anything*. I can't leave this corner for a minute. I never was in such a place! I really don't know what to do. The young lady who *was* waiting here—Miss Morley—*fainted* a few minutes ago,—it's the air, you know, and the window won't open,—and Mrs. Whitaker has just taken her home. They say she's the *second* one that's fainted to-day."

"How dreadful!" said Mrs. Briarley, with admiring pity. These were indeed martyrs to the cause.

"*Isn't* it? Mrs. Whitaker just asked me to

come in and stay with Gladys till she got back, and now Gladys has such a headache she isn't the slightest good, and it all comes on me. I'm only visiting here, and I've got to take the three o'clock train home. It puts me in an awful position."

She turned to a couple of wildly gesticulating women.

"Yes, you can have that dress for ten cents. No, *no!* Not you; the other one. No, you *didn't* speak first! I'll send for the police if you claw each other."

"Is there anything I can do?" asked Mrs. Briarley.

"If you wouldn't mind unwrapping some of those things over there, and marking them," said the girl. "I haven't had time to see to them since they came in. Mark them anything."

"Very well," said Mrs. Briarley, going deftly about the work. There was a waist and some boys' clothing, and there was a box, which she left for the last. It looked as if it might contain a hat.

It *was* a hat. A dark hat, yet not too dark, elegant, yet not noticeable, with a chaste outline, a temperate, subdued richness of effect that spoke volumes to the initiated. No wonder that Mrs. Briarley's eyes were glued to it as she held it in her hand. It was a hat that

could rise to the occasion of state garments or impart "style" to one's ordinary garb. It was a hat, in short, that could be Worn with Anything.

Mrs. Briarley turned it round and inspected it with a growing wonder. The white satin lining looked new, and the structure itself showed no sign of wear but two holes through which a hatpin had been thrust.

There *were* people who gave away things as little used as this. Mrs. Stebbins had spoken of it. If she herself had ever possessed a hat like this,—her thought went in leaps,—if it were not a rummage hat! But what if it were? Would any one know? There were many hats made on the same order. With a slight change in the front trimming—of course you didn't know who had worn it before, but there was a subtle odour of violet about it that was reassuring.

"How much is this hat?" asked Mrs. Briarley, suddenly, in an odd voice.

"Oh, I don't know," said the girl who had spoken before, looking around to catch a glimpse of it. "I sold a hat for fifteen cents just before you came in."

"This is *very* good," said Mrs. Briarley.

"Ask a quarter for it, then. For goodness' sake, Gladys, don't you get faint!"

"I'll take it myself," said Mrs. Briarley, hastily. "My—my cook might like it." She put it back in the box and tied the string around it. "The atmosphere in here *is* dreadful, isn't it? Can't I help you open that window? Here's the money. Good-bye!"

She had done it! She could hardly believe in the miracle. Not only would she have the happy thrill of responding to the appeal with her own precious and individual five dollars, but the very price she had paid for the hat went to the cause also, and she had money left over besides! And she had the hat!

She felt awestricken at so much reward of virtue. It was like seek ye first the kingdom of righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. If she had said her cook might like the hat, that was no lie; her cook well might. And she was so glad that she had enough humility herself to wear a rummage hat! Underneath all the simplicity of her vanity lay an earnest and tremulous joy in being more what the mother of Emily should be.

It has been stated that Mrs. Briarley did not belong to the Guild. She passed a delegation from it, indeed, the next day, all busily talking together; but there was nobody in it whom she even knew to bow to. She was perhaps the only woman in the parish who

did not know of the exciting incident at present disturbing it, the facts of which were being now recounted once again.

"Yes, the hat was almost new; it was a present to Mrs. Beatoun from her cousin. It was a beauty. Mrs. Beatoun was going out to lunch, and she sent the Peters boy back to the parsonage to get some bundles for the rummage sale, and that stupid new girl of hers gave him the box with the hat in it with the other things from her room. She had left it on the bed. So off it went to the sale. The only one who remembers anything about it is Gladys Tucker, and she doesn't remember much, she had such a headache. She says a lady—she thinks it was a lady—came in and bought one for a quarter; she heard her talking to Nannie Leduc. Gladys didn't even see it; the place was full of Italians. Of course the woman took advantage."

"Those girls are so scatter-brained! But no lady would have bought a hat there."

"That's just what I say. If she did, she must have known it was a mistake. That hat cost thirty dollars, and it had been worn twice. And to pay only a quarter for it! It was as bad as *stealing*. You know how reserved Mrs. Beatoun is, but she's decided, very. Well, she did say that if she saw any woman with it on she thought she would

really walk up to her and speak about it. It's the effrontery of the thing that's so maddening."

"Mrs. Beatoun never seemed to care much for clothes," said one lady.

"I suppose she's human, like the rest of us," said the first, grimly. "She's worn that black straw of hers five summers."

"I do believe she'd rather go without than not have just the right thing," said yet another. "Her family always thought a great deal of themselves, I've been told."

"Well, they have a right to," said the first speaker again. "Mrs. Beatoun's a good woman, but I didn't blame her for being angry to-day. When she's worked as hard as she has for the church, to be cheated in this way! And Gladys Tucker says she's sure it was a lady. Well, I told Mrs. Beatoun one thing. I said, 'Be sure we'll all look out for her!'"

Through all the week in which the disappearance of Mrs. Beatoun's Paris hat was canvassed Mrs. Briarley remained happily unconscious.

The excitement had reached fever-heat on Easter Sunday, that Sunday on which Mrs. Briarley's precious five-dollar bill was solemnly laid in the contribution plate. She, all her little lone self, was actually paying

off part of the church debt! It seemed to her as she left the church that several women looked at her rather oddly—or was it at her hat? She had changed the trimming a little in the front. Perhaps they were admiring it.

She had expected to take little Emily to the children's service in the afternoon, and when the child fell asleep instead, she went by herself. The service was pretty; it was full of flowers and music and children's voices. When it was ended she stood in the vestibule, lingering, with her eyes fixed on a group of women talking to Mrs. Beatoun.

Suddenly Mrs. Beatoun detached herself from the group and came forward, with tall figure held erect. There was a breathless pause. Those who were there knew that the wearer of the hat and the owner of the hat had met at last.

"Oh," said Mrs. Briarley, "I'm so glad you came to speak to me! I've been just hoping that you would!"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Beatoun.

"I wanted to tell you—I've never enjoyed going to church as I have to-day." Mrs. Briarley raised her rapt eyes to those of the rector's wife, who wore a little half-cynical smile. "I think your husband preaches such beautiful sermons. I never heard any that

made me feel so much like—like wanting to be good." Her voice dropped shyly.

"That is very nice, I'm sure," said Mrs. Beatoun, politely. "May I ask where you got your hat?"

"Oh, I'm so glad you asked!" said Mrs. Briarley. She was so full of her own earnestness of purpose that she kept on, oblivous to the chill in Mrs. Beatoun's tone. Her cheeks became pink, her eyes suffused. "I bought it at the rummage sale. Of course it must have been worn before, although it doesn't look it. I bought it because—I've been wanting to tell you that after Mr. Beatoun's appeal I *couldn't* spend the five dollars I had meant to on a hat, although I needed one. I just bought this at the sale, and gave the money to the church. I thought Mr. Beatoun might like to know he had made somebody feel that way. I never have thought of—things—before, and I wanted to thank him. I have been saying to myself, as I stood here, that if you came forward to speak to me, I'd take it as a—sign that I was to tell you this."

She paused a moment, and then went on. (While you were unburdening your heart, why not tell all?)

"I have a dear little girl at home, and I do so want to learn to be better—for her sake.

And I've thought if I could know you—I've been sort of afraid of you before, but I'm not now. And I love my little girl so *very* much——" She stopped again.

Something passed from one to the other as they stood there—Mrs. Briarley did not know what. There was a wonderful and sweet gentleness in the face of the older woman as it bent to the simple earnestness of the other. Mrs. Briarley's one little thought of truth had unerringly met and rounded its circle. It is not only at the sacramental table that we are partakers together of the Bread of Life.

"I'm so glad you told me!" said Mrs. Beatoun. She was not a demonstrative woman, but in that pause she had put her arms round Mrs. Briarley and kissed her, under the very shade of the rummage hat.

"And Mr. Beatoun will be glad, too. No, indeed, you must never be afraid of me again; and you must bring your little girl to see us. It was just sweet of you to think of telling me about the hat."

"I've noticed people looking at it," said Mrs. Briarley, all in a glow. "I never thought until to-day that it might be a mistake about its being sent to the sale. But you don't think so?"

"No, it's not a mistake," said Mrs. Beatoun,

with a sudden smile, as she added "and I'm in a position to know."

* * * * *

"Yes, I've joined the Guild," said Mrs. Briarley, with pride in her tone. "They've made me secretary already." She did not know how cordially that position was made the portion of the stranger. She was talking to her husband the evening of his return.

"Mrs. Beatoun couldn't have been more interested about that five dollars if she had given it herself. You've no idea how nice everybody in the Guild is to me; they seem to take pains to be kind. But Mrs. Beatoun—there's something about Mrs. Beatoun I can't explain!"

"Well?" said her husband, enjoyingly. Mrs. Briarley was in a washed white muslin, with ribbons the exact blue of her innocent eyes. She did not look as if she could be the mother of an Emily.

"I believe Mrs. Beatoun is really—fond of me!"

"That's very strange," said Mrs. Briarley's husband.

Madonna of the Toys: A Christmas Story

Madonna of the Toys: A Christmas Story

"I DON'T know what to give him for Christmas!"

Mrs. Tom looked tragically at the group consulting over their father-in-law in the old-fashioned library. Miss Clara, the unmarried daughter, had left the room.

"We have a picture," announced Mrs. Andrew complacently; "a cathedral interior, beautifully dark and perspective. Little Mary has a cup and saucer, and Francis a whisk broom."

"My boys can give black-bordered silk handkerchiefs," said Mrs. Frank. "Clara suggests that I have that armchair re-covered, the one he never sits in."

"Malcolm had better get him another dozen cases of mineral water," said Mrs. Malcolm. "When it's in the house he drinks it. But that hardly seems enough, father's so generous to us. I shall buy a small refrigerator for his room—it's so useful in sickness."

"What do you think of rubber water-bags

in assorted sizes?" suggested Mrs. Walter eagerly. "If he had a pain in two or three places at once they'd be very handy."

"Ah!" Mrs. Frank lowered her voice. "I dread coming here Christmas afternoon and staying to supper; don't you? *We* can get along all right, and the little girls bring their dolls, but boys are so restless—and men, too! It was so different when Kate and her children were living here, but last year——! Clara doesn't know how to make the house attractive."

"She worries so now that father has to stay up-stairs," agreed Mrs. Malcolm feelingly. "The boys love their grandfather, but there's nothing for them to do. Why, Violet, you're not going?"

"I must," answered a girl with reddish hair and pretty, long-lashed eyes, who was Mrs. Arthur. She had risen, and was throwing a white boa around her neck. Her white teeth flashed suddenly in a smile: "I never was of so much importance before. Good-bye, everybody!"

She ran down the hall, looking in at an open doorway to call an audacious "Last tag!" to a tall old man who sat there reading, and receive his quick, amused response before she went swiftly homeward.

Violet's appointment with the baby was

very important indeed. As she sat afterwards in the darkened nursery, with the infant's little downy head against her warm breast, her thoughts went back to grandfather. Somehow his Christmas prospects depressed her—the dark picture and the mineral water, the re-covered chair, the refrigerator and the rubber bags seemed so unlightsome; there was nothing from which the most willing mind could conjure festivity. Even the perennial handkerchiefs and whisk brooms and cups and saucers failed to cheer her. It seemed dreadful to be so old that you weren't supposed to want anything anybody else did, to have everything so tiresomely suitable. Violet had an irreverent desire to send her father-in-law a pink necktie or a flippant poster.

There could be no greater contrast to the needs of Age than this softly-curtained place, with its white furniture, and a blue rug in front of the brass andirons on which the pine logs burned aromatically. A blue and white bassinet swung by a gilded rod, and a white willow hamper showed the blue satin-lined tray, filled with miniature ivory toilet articles, and tiny garments, laced and ribboned—all the dainty appanage of a "first" baby.

A silver and mother-of-pearl rattle and a French clown, belled and tinselled, on a white

stick, lay upon the blue table-cover, while a large drum, fastened on the wall above, showed that in the pride of welcoming a boy love hadn't been able to wait for him to grow into his heritage.

Her sisters-in-law characterized Violet fondly as a mere child; in truth she was a jolly little girl, but underneath the jollity were the directness and insight, and the shy, deep feeling of a child, so hidden as to be almost unguessed. Only her husband saw and reverenced that unfathomed sweetness. But even he did not know of those far-off journeys which her spirit took in company with her little new-born son, in the wonder of his soft, warm mouth, his tiny feet, and unconscious, clasping fingers.

The birth of her child had been to Violet also the birth of Thought; she pondered on the mysteries; for the first time she realized the existence of that great chain whose links are composed alternately of life and death, with the coming and the going of generations. In this infant life she saw the time when her own days should be numbered, and grew pale, yet unafraid, as she held him closer, because the goodness of God was so near.

He was such a very little baby that he was not much of anything as yet to any one but

his mother, though his father was indeed unmeasurably proud of him as a son and heir, and regarded him with deeply expectant, if amused, affection. But to Violet he was a wellspring not only of the traditional pleasure but of infinitely more. As one who stands with the ear to a sea-shell, rapt with the sound of the mysterious murmurs of the far-off ocean, so Violet, when she sat bending over her baby, felt a deep, tremulous connection with beautiful, unseen things that were holiness unto the Lord. She was so happy that she longed for every one to be happy; her child-heart even yearned maternally over grandfather, who had lived so many years that people couldn't see that he was still young. She was a partner in the secret; if she called "Last tag" to him it was because she knew he liked it. He was a kind, wise old man, who submitted patiently to Miss Clara's fusses and restrictions because he saw the love back of them; and he had lived his life so fully and well that it did not seem worth while to strive to live it now. Yet sometimes, as Violet divined, he was contented to dwell in the past because the present was a little lonely now that the house was no longer the rallying-place for the young, as in the time of his daughter Kate, who had children of her own.

"Little blessedest! I want your grandfather to have a Merry Christmas," said Violet confidingly to the baby in her arms, who raised his tiny lashes as if in response, and looked at her an instant before the lids fell shut again. She pressed him closer in adoration. "Oh, aren't you sweet, *aren't* you sweet!" and fell to kissing him softly, a process from which she found that mothers gain wisdom.

"Did you decide what to get for father yesterday?" asked her husband the next morning. He was a man of noticeably fine appearance, and a lawyer of repute; it was still a wonder in the family how he had ever come to marry Violet, who yet seemed to suit him exactly.

"No," answered Violet.

"Then I think you'd better get that new dictionary I was speaking of; it's published by Worden. I'll leave you the money."

"I thought he had so many dictionaries."

"My dear child, that's just the reason for giving him another."

"I will not get him a dictionary," said Violet. Yet she weakened after a tour through the shops. She could find nothing for her father-in-law that appealed in the least to an imagination all ready to be fired. Yet it was joy to be out for Christmas shop-

ping in the crisp air to one who had been so little able lately to go abroad, while before her raptured vision she saw ever a wee sock hung by the nursery hearth, and a tiny lighted tree. Many little children were to be made happy this holy-tide because her child had come to her—Violet's thank-offering had flowed by many streams to reach unseen baby hands. As she went along now she stopped to slip coins into the palms of longing boys and girls looking in at Christmas-decked windows.

"Oh, *Violet!*"

It was Mrs. Tom who clutched her. "Isn't it dreadful—the rush! I'm nearly dragged to pieces. I've just bought an inkstand for father, in the shape of a peach, with a thermometer on it—the kind of thing no one ever uses, but I was desperate. I've a big woolly sheep for your baby, but if you think he's too little for it ——"

"Oh, *no!*" cried Violet, her face rosy with pleasure. "How dear of you!" She could have embraced Mrs. Tom before crossing over to the toy store, a ravishing spot, one window of which was given up to regiments and regiments of lead soldiers afoot and on horseback, on a green plain dotted with little round white tents. The other window was filled with dolls sitting at tea-tables, swinging,

or lying in pink or blue-and-white beds like the baby's at home. When Violet was a little girl she had always been taken through this shop at Christmas time; it was one of the delights of the season, but never had it seemed so delightful as now, when she was buying toys for a "first" Christmas, while music-boxes played, and animals squeaked, and rattling, whirring mechanical toys ran riot.

She stopped at last by a counter laden with glittering tree ornaments. Opposite were shelves filled with stationary engines varied with an occasional boat or locomotive. There seemed to be no clerk there, but a small boy, seven or eight years of age, with a white sailor cap pushed back to make a halo around his short golden curls, was walking backward and forward, regarding the display with rapt, angelic eyes, and incidentally putting out the tip of his chubby forefinger to touch a cylinder or an electric battery. Looking up suddenly he caught Violet's eye; they both smiled, and she came over to him. So might her own little boy look some day.

"Do you like engines?"

"Yes," said the boy with a deep, indrawn breath. He forestalled criticism: "I'm not too little to have one; my papa says so!

He'll run it for me. He's down-stairs now." He pointed to the shelf. "Do you see this one? That's where you pour the alcohol in —and this is the steam gauge—and here's the safety-valve. She's a hummer! And this 'lectric—that's a hummer, too!"

"Oh," said Violet. She sought for more definite accomplishment. "What do they do?"

"They go!" answered the little boy. "And they set other things going, too, if you want 'em." He indicated an array near by: fountains, a man sawing wood, a printing press, and the like. "You 'tach 'em by a thread. See that one up there?" He pointed to a large cylinder of grey burnished steel. His tone fell to one of reverence. "It pumps water!"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Violet with delightful appreciation. "I'm so glad to talk to you because I have a little boy myself, but he isn't as big as you—he's only six weeks old."

"Gee!" said the little boy with his angelic smile. "I never knew any one as little as that." He stopped disapprovingly. "Why, that's only a *baby!*"

"Ah, that's what people call him," said Violet, sagely; "they think he can't even talk. Of course he doesn't really say any-

thing, but we have long conversations together—I always know what he means."

The little boy nodded. "My mamma and I talk that way too," he said simply.

"Then there's another one—I wish you'd tell me what to buy for him—he's about seventy or eighty years older."

"But that's an old man!" cried the boy in wonder.

Violet shook her head. "Oh, no! Of course, that's what people call him," she explained again, tolerantly; "but we know better."

The boy looked at her debatingly. "Is it 'Once Upon a Time,' or is it 'A True Story'?" he asked.

"It's both," said Violet.

Their eyes met this time in the joyousness of mutual understanding.

"I like you, I like you," cried the little boy, and tucked his hand into hers, jumping along with both feet in short, flying leaps. "Come here! I'll show you what to buy for him, I'll show you; *that!* Oh, there's my papa beckoning to me!"

He dropped her hand and disappeared like a flash in the crowd by the stairs.

"Well," said Violet to herself, staring in front of her. "Well—why not?"

"I couldn't get here a minute sooner—I

had to lie down after I got them all out of the house."

Mrs. Tom, arriving late at the paternal mansion on Christmas afternoon, was taking off her wraps in the hall as she looked in at the circle of sisters-in-law sitting around the fire in the drawing-room, warm with the smell of cedar, and bedecked with scarlet holly. Through the open doorway beyond the mahogany table, set with the old white-and-gold china, showed promise of good things to come.

"How cozy you all look in here—but where are the others?" asked Mrs. Tom.

Miss Clara spread out her hands with a gesture of dismay, belied by her beaming face.

"Well, you'll never guess—every man and boy is up-stairs with father, trying to run that crazy engine Violet sent him; it's one of those dreadful electrical things. If I'd had the remotest idea what was in the box—and she never even told Arthur! You can't get one of them out of that room, except to —— Listen to that!"

A boy's footsteps came hurtling down the back stairs, and a moment later an excited voice called:

"Will it work?"

"No," came from above.

"Oh, I see what's the matter. Will it work now?"

"No."

"Wait a moment till I come up."

"They've been doing that for two mortal hours," said Mrs. Malcolm placidly. "They have miles of wire trying to attach something—don't ask me what, for I haven't the faintest idea. Of course it won't work; engines never do; if they did all the occupation would be gone. My husband is just as bad as the rest. They all have engines at home, but they say Violet's beats the lot. Just hear that child laugh; she's been up there all the afternoon. We've been having the most beautifully restful time down here by ourselves. I haven't seen father look so happy in months, and in all that clatter! *Did* you hear that Kate is coming back?"

"Will you listen to that!" said Mrs. Walter.

The inevitable footsteps were clattering again madly down-stairs, with the accompanying voice:

"Will it work?"

"No."

"Oh, I guess I see what's the matter with it this time. Will it work now?"

"No."

"Wait till I come up!"

The end of a holiday is the dearest part of

a happy one, when the jewels are counted over, to be strung on the silver thread of memory. The lights were turned down low in the nursery, so that the flames of the fire of aromatic pine were reflected rosily from the white surface of the enamelled furniture, as Violet sat there in her loose blue gown, her reddish hair half curling over her shoulders, rocking her little son with his head pressed against her white bosom. After all the merry Christmas Day, after all the clatter, and jollity, and family chatter, the supper, the plum pudding, and the lighted candles, and the children's carols of the Child Divine, she was back here once more with her little, little son—the life that was mysteriously her life too. Ah, not because of the feasting and the presents, nor the merry companionship, not all because of the inspiring engine even, had the day been Christmas indeed to an old man and those who felt the sweetness, unknowing. Through Violet's happiness had come the Angel Note.

The drum hung upon the wall, and set out on the blue rug was a small farmyard of animals, with the large white woolly sheep and a brown tin cow on wheels, towering above them. On the table stood a tiny Christmas tree, decked with a red, a blue and a yellow candle, a little horse, a little

horn, a candy hen and a glittering star, and on the mantel was a paper angel in white and tinsel with dovelike wings and floating hair.

Violet's husband coming through the room put his hand tenderly on her hair as he passed.

"Little mother!" he said.

She leaned her head back against his hand, her eyes mutely acknowledging his caress, before she withdrew once more into that holy place where she lived to-night with the child, and where even the man she loved could not follow her.

The Name of The Firm

The Name of The Firm

"SO you've lost your place," said his mother.

She looked with tender thoughtful eyes at the lad before her, and smoothed his fair hair with a hand that had to reach up to touch it, for she was a little woman.

"Yes," said the boy, with a lip that he could not keep from quivering a little. "Somehow I didn't expect it. Of course, I know lots of the fellows have been turned off lately; times are dull just now, and the firm always cut down the force when they can. It's easy enough to take on new men when they want them, and those who have been there longest have first right to stay. I know that. But somehow I had thought that father's work with them——"

"Yes," said his mother. She sat down in a low chair, and with a gesture drew the boy to her side. "You say you had not expected to be turned away, Francis. Neither had I thought of it! There were reasons—— Your father thought that your future was assured, at least, if only—only as an atonement to him. The firm did not promise me to take care of you, to be sure, but it was

understood. They sent at once, you know, and offered you the position. It was only right that you should begin at the bottom of the ladder."

"The bottom of the ladder is about under ground there," said the boy with a whimsical shake of his head. "It's pretty low down, I can tell you! Why there are firms not a quarter so rich as they who pay their boys more—enough for car-fare and shoes and lunch, *anyway*—of course, though that's one of the ways they *get* rich. I'm not complaining. But I thought to-day if father were the head of the business, and I had been one of Mr. Nelson's boys ——"

"Your father loved Mr. Nelson," said the mother, after a silence during which the two had sat with clasped hands. "And Mr. White too," she added.

"And didn't they love him?"

"Yes, once—before they began to make so much money, and after it,—perhaps—sometimes! I don't know. Mr. Nelson was moved when he came to see me that first time; he meant to be kind about you. To your father he was always the friend he had loved even when he was cut to the heart with John Nelson's altered ways. There are some people who are *born* constant."

"But don't you mind," said the boy, a little

wistfully, "that I am thrown out of the place? I walked around the town two hours this morning before I could make up my mind to come and tell you, though I knew it Friday. I was afraid it would be too great a shock to you; and yet you don't seem to think anything of it at all."

"You will be taken back with a larger salary," said his mother quietly. "You need not look so startled, Francis. I know Nelson and White—what they used to be, and what they are now; I know them thoroughly. If there were any other way —— Dear, there are some things that I cannot tell you, but your father's son shall not be turned from his old firm while I live. They must respect the honour of their name. No, don't tell me not to go to them! I'll not shame you. I am not going to beg them to take you back again, I have the right to demand it. Trust me, Francis!"

"I do, mother," said the boy, but half doubtfully, as he stooped and kissed the face raised to his.

It was a pretty face, with a broad low forehead and clear grey eyes, dark now with a purpose that he could not understand. He felt uncomfortable without knowing why, as he met their gaze. There was something in them that was not like mother.

She looked a small enough figure going down the street in her plain black garments and little black bonnet—a small figure to hold the fate of a big business house in that white envelope in her hands. For two years past she had felt that it would come to this some day. The thrill of definite fulfilment tingled now in every tense nerve. The father's fate should not be his son's too.

She remembered her husband's bright faith in the friends of his youth, when they were first married; how he had worked for them with all the powers of body and mind, the manager who ran the business machinery of the house and whose honesty was like the sun, radiating his every act, and whose justice was tempered with mercy. Heaven only knew—and heaven *did* know—how many boys he had saved from temptation by the kind word in season, how many men he had heartened by his prompt recognition of work well done. He was a man who gave of himself, unvaryingly, to those with whom he came in daily contact, and was a greater factor in the prosperity of the great house than the members of the firm. She remembered how proud he had been of their commercial honesty, and how he had kept his faith in their own personal friendship for him even after the benumbing influences of trade

and the exigencies of prosperity had kept them really aloof from each other for months and years. When there was a child born, or a death in the family, the business mask dropped for a few minutes perhaps, to show the old time faces underneath, and the manager loved them, and talked about them long afterwards to his wife. Some day, when John Nelson and Harry White had time——

Then the policy of the house changed. The manager's salary was cut down; he was no longer called into the confidences of the firm. His wife remembered with hot cheeks and clenched hands how that had hurt him. It was the thought that they could have done it; he would have lived on a pittance willingly if they had needed money. But he defended them, of course; it was his way. He was a very proud man, so proud that his friends' honour was as his very own; who doubted it, insulted him.

And then—ah, that was hardest! to know that what you love is rotten at the core. That man had no business to tell her husband, but every one in the house told George more even of their own private affairs than he cared to hear. Nothing that went on, for or against their prospects, for or against the good of the business, nay, for or against himself, but was brought to his knowledge for

comfort, advice, or denial. He had always borne his full freight of other people's troubles

But this thing —— His wife knew how the burden of it had brought the beginning of his illness. It struck at the life of the firm; they had survived, but the blow had killed him. They had used his honesty to cheat with, and had offered him as the sacrifice when they were on the point of detection. Johnson, who partly in horror, partly in protesting doubt, had shown him, with trembling adjurations to utter secrecy, the incriminating paper, did not know that George held the other half of the clue. To have used it in his own defense was to betray one who trusted him, and defile the fair name of the firm.

His widow clasped the envelope tighter in her hands. She had been to her husband the priestess of his heart's inmost confessional; he had given her a sacred confidence.

But her whole soul rose in rebellion to the thought that her boy was to be sacrificed as her husband had been, with no hand upraised to help him. Her hand was small, but it held a mighty truth in it! All the sense of wrong, and yearning heart-break of years, surged within, to bring with them a fierce avenging joy. Her promise to her husband? He had not known to what it would bind her; she

felt herself fully absolved. Nelson and White, Nelson and White, their day of reprisal had come at last. The powerful fetich of their name would crumble into dust, when she struck it!

The dingy brick building with its gaping doorway gave her a shock as she came suddenly upon it. She had not seen it for over two years. That was the doorway under which George used to pass, the steep, worn, wooden staircase, that up which he was wont to climb daily. She had sometimes stopped here for him on her way home. She held her breath with a sickness of heart as she traversed the familiar ways again, looking perforce in at the windowed door behind which his desk *used* to stand. She was to climb higher today, to the sacred rooms of the Firm, the mighty power that had brought into being those rows and rows of clerks at the desks below.

She took her seat on a wooden settle outside the door of the office, which, open at the top, was screened off with ground glass in one corner of the long room, and waited her turn for an audience. She hardly saw the inquiring glances given her from time to time by the clerks; she was full of an intensity of purpose that cut through conventions like a knife. But presently the conversation carried

on by the rising voices of men within the office forced itself upon her consciousness unpleasantly.

"Mein Gott! then I lose twenty t'ousand dollar! Consider what that means to me, shentlemen. At this time, at *this* time, it is ruin!"

"You should have looked out for that before, Hartmann," answered a cold voice, that the listener recognized as Nelson's. "We gave you opportunity to examine the goods—you cannot say we did not. If your man was a fool it's not our fault. We gave you opportunity."

"Oh, oppo-*chu*nity," moaned Hartmann. "Mein Gott, what oppo-*chu*-nity! And the whole cargo rotten! Consider, shentlemen, that it is ruin."

White's high shrill tones broke in with an imprecation, "Consider—as you're so fond of the word—that you tried to cheat us, and got caught; consider that you tried to cut *our* throat, and we've cut *yours*. You might have known you hadn't a ghost of a chance with us. We *know* you're ruined, and we don't *care*. Understand that. We don't care. Any one who thinks he can work that game on us gets left. You've got the rotten cargo, and we've got your twenty thousand dollars, and we're going to *keep* it.

If I were you I wouldn't talk too much about the story, you don't show up any too well in it."

"But my wife, my shildrens," moaned the man.

"See here, Hartmann," said Nelson, with dignity, "this is business. Either you talk business, or get out of here. On second thoughts you get out of here anyway. We've had enough of you for one day. You think so, too, White? Shall I get somebody to put you out, Hartmann? No? Then *go!*"

He held the office door open, with a compelling gesture of his free hand and a little man, bowed together, weeping and mumbling by turns, came stumbling out as if blinded. As he did so, a boy with papers slipped into the office, and behind him came a tall, pale clerk, with shabby clothes, and a gentle, anxious face.

"Ah, Cramer," said Nelson, half looking up from the papers as he scanned them quickly in turn before affixing his signature. "What can I do for you to-day?"

"I was told that you wanted to speak to me, sir," said Cramer.

"Mr. White, I believe, takes your department in hand. White!"

"The fact is," said White, "we shall not

need you after the first of the month, Mr. Cramer. You asked for an increase of salary."

"I cannot live on what I get now," said Cramer. "I have others to support."

"Exactly. We are sorry, but you must understand that we cannot run a charitable institution. This is strictly business. On inquiry, we find that other men in similar positions are willing to live on *less* than you are getting now, and it is our principle to reduce our expenses whenever we can. You must know that."

The listener inferred that Cramer bowed. "My services have been satisfactory, irrespective of salary?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly. We shall be glad to recommend you. That is all at present, Mr. Cramer."

He had gone. Mrs. Stannard sitting out there felt a strange discomposure—pity, and a helpless revolt against this iron system of injustice: an injustice that hurt her idea of the promoters of it more than those under them—they had been her husband's friends.

"There's a lady waiting outside," said the boy, who was going out with the papers. She rose perforce.

"Mrs. Stannard! Nelson, here is Mrs. Stannard." White handed out a chair from

a dark corner, and Nelson came forward cordially. Both men looked worn and tired, Nelson tall and thin and dark, with deeply-lined face; White, short and slight and fair. Both gave an effect of trying to brush off an habitual and haunting care, to welcome this unexpected visitor. She had known them since her girlhood; Nelson used to write poetry, and White had even been in love with her sister once. He was such a tender-hearted fellow then, he couldn't bear to have the least of God's creatures suffer pain. She answered mechanically the usual inquiries as to her health, while she was thinking of these things.

"We are glad you happened to come in, Mrs. Stannard," said Nelson. "We have just found that there was a little money due your husband still on that last patent. Write out a check for fifty-six dollars, if you please, White, for Mrs. Stannard. There, that's right, I think. There is so much that's disagreeable in the business that we're glad to have something pleasant to communicate occasionally."

"Yes," said Mrs. Stannard. She added after a moment, "Thank you." She was looking at the appurtenances of the little office, and at the two men in it. This was where George used to stand when he came

here to talk to them, in this dusty cramped space, the high office desks half shutting out the light. What had been his feelings? How he had loved them, Nelson and White—Nelson and White who had killed him!

Something hard in her eyes seemed to strike White.

"We are sorry that we had to dismiss Francis," he said apologetically. "It is always hard to have to make changes of that kind, but we depend entirely on Mr. Ulmer's arrangements in that department. As I understand, it was a choice between him and Griggs, and Griggs had the better handwriting. Francis should improve. It is simply a matter of business."

"Yes," said Mrs. Stannard again. She sat there, a small, unpretending figure in her black gown, very fair and young looking in the dingy office surroundings. She was twisting the white envelope in her fingers, the weapon that George had unwittingly left her that she was to wield in behalf of his son —if she wanted to.

"We have missed George a great deal in these last two years," said Nelson with a change of tone, and an obvious effort of recollection. "Nobody had the interest in the firm that he had, Mrs. Stannard. His only fault was that he was not quite up to

date in matters of management; he was a splendid organizer, but he let his feelings run away with him too much. This recognizing individual ability is all very well in its way, but if you are going in to make money the interests of the house must come first. George never could drive a really sharp bargain—I don't mind saying it, Mrs. Stannard, for he owned it himself—and it was a credit to his heart, of course—he could not keep up to date in that way. The modern methods of business require *tremendous* concentration of purpose. White and I"—he glanced at White, who stood near him, gazing seriously at the visitor—"have been quite worn out with our efforts lately, but we have been very successful. Of three firms who were in competition with us at the beginning of the year, two have broken up and had to give in to our terms already, and the third will before long. It's a pretty fair record. George's only fault—and that was a credit to his heart—was that he was not good at such transactions, he let his feelings run away with him."

"Yes, that was his only fault," said White.

Oh, if they only would not speak of George! She suddenly felt that it was the one thing she could not bear.

"How is your wife, Mr. Nelson?" she asked hurriedly.

"My wife? She was well when I last heard from her. She and the children have been in Dresden—she is there for their education, you know—expects to be gone three years."

"It must be very lonely for you. Why don't you go over, too?" she hazarded.

"Work, work! That's what keeps me here. I give you my word, Mrs. Stannard, the business is so immense now, the operations of the house so large, that I can hardly take even a day off. Here's White trying to get away to his sick boy up in Minnesota for a couple of weeks, and yet we can't see how to manage it, just at this time, without losing the firm a deal that will give us enormous profit."

"Is your boy ill?" asked Mrs. Stannard, turning sympathetically to White. His only child was the age of her Francis.

White nodded, with his boyish face suddenly turned grey and haggard, like that of an old, old man.

"He—he's crippled," he answered. "He had a bad fall. Didn't you hear? Hurt himself racing. The doctors give us some hope, there's no immediate danger, but his strength seems to be going. That's the main point, you know—strength. I've thought if I could get up to Minnesota just now, to help

his mother—— But I can't seem to make it out. Of course, business comes first."

"God *help* you, Harry!" said Mrs. Stannard, softly. She had risen and he stretched out his hand and took hers in it, and held it for a moment in a tight grip, with his head turned away.

"You were always good, Clara," he said huskily. I hope He will."

"You have dropped your letter," said Nelson, coming forward. "Or perhaps you do not want it?"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Stannard. "No, I do not want it now." Send Francis here, where if he would be successful he must learn to fight against every impulse of his higher nature? What would his father have said? She tore the paper into small pieces with fingers that were firmly tense. "May I put these in your scrap basket? I know that I have taken up too much of your time, Mr. Nelson, I will say good-bye."

"I am glad to have seen you, Mrs. Stannard," he said. He looked at his partner, who stood, turned from them, his arms resting on the tall desk, and his head buried in them, and then looked back again at her. She made a movement of comprehension, and slipped quietly out of the door, and pulling her veil quickly over her face, went

down the long stairs again that her husband had been wont to traverse, feeling that the dear form was somehow at her side. But she saw nothing, for her eyes were blinded by tears, not for White's sorrow, not for her husband's death, but for another and irremediable loss; tears that overflowed and ran down her cheeks, and seemed to keep welling up exhaustlessly from her heart; tears from a pity so deep that it had its source in every happiness of high thought and noble aim and unselfish love that had made her life.

No need to break her faith with the dead! She would not have her boy back in that house of corruption, for all the gifts of Fortune. No need, no need, for her to strike at the name of the firm! That name, so loved, so honoured, slaved for, died for—God in heaven, for *what* did the Name of the Firm stand?

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